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REFORMIST MUSLIM APPROACHES TO THE POLEMICS OF THE QUR'ĀN AGAINST OTHER RELIGIONS

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Achmad Sirry, and my late mother, Samsumi (passed away on February 10, 2012 while I was finishing this dissertation), who raised me and opened up my eyes to a world of possibilities. I also dedicate this work to numerous teachers at various schools that I attended. Specifically, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, *ustādh* Michael Sells, and members of my dissertation committee, Professors Fred Donner and James T. Robinson. Finally, I dedicate this work to my wife, Nunung Nurhasanah, and my son, Kemal Ananda Perdana, without whom this would not be.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with Muslim reformers' interpretation of a number of difficult passages in the Qur'ān that have often been regarded as obstacles to inter-religious relations. As is known, several passages of the Qur'ān are polemical in nature, especially against Jews and Christians. The basic contention of this study is that scriptural polemics are primarily intended as a means by which to establish and consolidate the identity of a religious community. What do scriptural polemics mean in the modern context? How have the Qur'ān's polemical texts been interpreted by modern Muslim reformers? To what extent have their modern and local contexts shaped, and been shaped by, their understanding of the Qur'ān? Is there room for interpreting the Qur'ān's polemical texts for non-polemical interactions among different religious communities in the modern world? These questions form the major concern of this dissertation.

Six modern *tafsīr*s (Qur'ān commentaries) written by Muslim reformers from different parts of the Muslim world are examined, namely, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d.1914) from Syria; *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Rashīd Riḍā (d.1935) from Egypt; *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (d.1958) from India; *al-Tafsīr al-Kāshif* by Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (d.1979) from Lebanon; *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī (d.1981) from Iran; and *Tafsīr al-Azhar* by Haji 'Abd al-Malik Karim Amrullah, known as Hamka (d.1981) from Indonesia. Since the Qur'ānic polemics involve many contentious issues of inter-religious engagements, this dissertation focuses on certain aspects that are central to the understanding of the polemical elements of the Qur'ān, including (1) seemingly exclusivist views of other religions, (2) charges of scriptural falsification, (3) theological disputes

over Jesus and the Trinity, and (4) restrictions on inter-religious interaction and cooperation. However, before dealing with these four major themes, the polemical context and nature of the Qur'ān are also examined. This dissertation will shed light on some difficulties that Muslim reformers had faced in their interpretation of the Qur'ān's polemical passages as well as on the diversity of their approaches to the contextualization of the Qur'ān in the modern time.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the following questions: How have the polemical texts of the Qur'ān been interpreted by modern Muslim reformers? To what extent have their modern contexts shaped, and been shaped by, their understanding of the Qur'ān? Is there room for interpreting the Qur'ān's polemical texts for non-polemical interactions among different religious communities in the modern world? In this dissertation I offer an in-depth analysis of reformist Muslim interpretation of a number of Qur'ānic passages that have often been viewed as obstacles to interreligious relations. I have decided to undertake this study because there are very few scholarly studies of the Qur'ān's polemical discourses on other religions.[1]

Even in the long history of Western Qur'ān scholarship, there has not been a systematic study of the polemical elements in the Qur'ān as scholars put much emphasis on the extent to which the Qur'ān borrows from Jewish and Christian traditions. As shown in a pioneered study by the ninetieth-century German scholar Abraham Geiger, the existence of parallel themes in the Qur'ān and Jewish religious texts is thoroughly examined, while their differences, let alone their

[1] While there are a few studies on the Qur'an's polemical texts, much has been written about Muslim polemical literature, some aspect of which can be seen in the following studies: Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Jacques Waardenburg (ed.) *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gabriel S. Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in a Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For earlier studies, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Chisten und Juden* (Leipzig, 1877; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966); Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau: Müller and Seiffert, 1930).

polemics, are left unexplored.[2] In his prizewinning essay, which was later accepted as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Marburg and published in 1833 in German under the title *Was hat Muhammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Geiger attempts to prove the Jewish influence on Muḥammad based on two sets of facts. The first set of facts establishes a presumptive case for the alleged borrowing in the sense that there were elements of other religions that have been taken over by and integrated into an emergent Islam. Geiger assumes that absorption of certain ideas is possible because one culture was relatively open to the concepts of another culture. The second, quite obviously, is that which allows us to show that the elements allegedly borrowed are of Jewish rather than Christian or ancient Arabian origins.[3]

Geiger's study is generally regarded as an important development in the modern critical research on Muḥammad and the origins of Islam.[4] This is evident from the fact that, as Andrew

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[2] Prior to Geiger's groundbreaking book, what we have is mostly polemical writings about the Qur'ān, rather than scholarly studies on the Qur'ān's polemical texts. For polemical writings on the Qur'ān in Western scholarship, see Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Burman, "Polemic, Philology, and Ambivalence: Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15 (2004): pp. 181-209. On more general study, see Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'ān," in Jane McAuliffe (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 235-251.

[3] Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Muhammed aus dem judenthume aufgenommen?*(Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); English translation, *Judaism and Islam*, trans. F.M. Young (Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898) and reprinted (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970). Geiger examines fourteen central themes, such as hell, paradise, divine presence, law, as well as the basic Islamic belief in the unity of God, and argues they entered Islam either directly from rabbinic literature or from the Hebrew Bible as mediated by Jewish interpretation. His method consisted of locating Qur'ānic parallels with Biblical and rabbinic literature. For example, Jews and Muslims alike pray while standing, but allow also for other positions. He notes that in both faiths, prayer while intoxicated was explicitly prohibited (Muslims, as opposed to Jews, later forbade intoxicants in all places and at all times). In both faiths, ritual ablutions are required before praying, but when water is unavailable, sand may be used for purification, an obvious concession to Jewish and Muslim travelers in desolate areas. Geiger is aware of the fact that there are some differences in the parallels he cites. He explains these differences in three ways. In some cases, Muḥammad purposefully distorted or misrepresented Jewish teachings in order to make them fit the historical, cultural, or moral-ethical contexts in which he was working. In others he did not alter the information he received from his informants, but the uneducated Jewish community in Medina did not know it correctly, thereby causing the discrepancy. Finally, in some cases he recorded the information incorrectly, either because he misunderstood its meaning or because he received it in an oral rather than written form, thereby allowing for greater error. See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam,* p. 10-18.

[4] See Rudi Paret's evaluation of Geiger in *The Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities: German Orientalists since Theodor Nöldeke* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968). For a summary of Geiger's personal history and his contribution to the field of Islamic studies, see Jacob Lassner, "Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century

Rippin has rightly noted, "the subsequent scholarly community has always treated Geiger's work as seminal in the history of the discipline."[5] His argument concerning Jewish influence on the Qur'ān provoked a rich discussion in the field of Islamic studies. During the century following the publication of Geiger's dissertation, a series of studies appeared in German arguing for the predominance of Jewish influence on Islam. However, during the same period, a revisionist scholarship came into being, arguing for the predominance of Christian influence on Islamic origins. One example is Julius Wellhausen, who, in his *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (1887), claims that the primary source of Muḥammad's inspiration was Christian.[6]

This question of the sources which lie behind the Qur'ān not only ignores the polemical elements of the Qur'ān against both Judaism and Christianity, but also sets the tone for later scholarship as exemplified by the works of Richard Bell,[7] David Sidersky,[8] Heinrich Speyer,[9] and Charles Torrey,[10] with the stress variously being placed on Jewish or on Christian influence.[11] However, this does not mean that the Qur'ān's polemical discourses on other religions do not attract the scholars' attention. Recently a scholarly interest in this issue has increased significantly. This can be seen from the flurry of books and articles that delve into the

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Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam," in M. Kramer (ed.) *The Jewish Discovery Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1999), pp. 103-35; Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially chapter two "Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Prelude of Revisionist Configuration."

[5] Andrew Rippin, "Introduction," in Rippin (ed.) *The Qur'ān: Style and Contents* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), p. xii.

[6] Julius Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1897).

[7] Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1926).

[8] David Sidersky, *Les Origines des Légendes Musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les Vies des Prophètes* (Paris: Librarie Orientalisie Paul Geuthner, 1933).

[9] Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971).

[10] Charles Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1967).

[11] Commenting on this issue, H.A.R. Gibb argues that "it is absurd to postulate even as a hypothesis, a 'Jewish foundation' for Islam; the phrase 'Christian environment' has the merit of being at least less assertive, and leaves room for an intermediate group or groups." See Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia," *The Harvard Theological Review* 55/4 (Oct. 1962), p. 273.

content of the Qur'ān and its attitude toward other religious communities. Such a discussion, especially when dealing with thematic issues in the Qur'ān such as the Qur'ān attitudes toward Jews and Christians, must address the complex nature of polemical and non-polemical passages in the Qur'ān. Yet even with this increased interest in this issue, the polemic of the Qur'ān has not often received thorough attention as an important topic in its own right.

In Jewish and Christian traditions, much has been written about religious polemics in the Bible.[12] Some scholars argue that scripture by its very nature is polemical.[13] The term "polemics" here is meant those texts of holy scriptures that describe other religions negatively, which include both explicit and implicit criticisms of other religious communities. In examining Biblical narratives, Yairah Amit distinguishes between explicit and implicit (or hidden) polemics. She characterizes the former as "a statement that challenges the claim that biblical narrative is not usually much engaged with overt ideological statement."[14] Together with the explicit polemics there are also implicit polemics, "in which the stances represented are embodied in roundabout and indirect way."[15] What concerns us here is the first type of polemics that contains an aggressive attack on the beliefs of another party.

Some scholars offer a useful classification of polemical texts in the Gospels. Douglas Hare, for instance, suggests a threefold classification that divides the polemics of the Gospels

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[12] A recent scholarly discussion on religious polemics took place at the international conference on "Religious Polemics in Context," held at Leiden on 27-28 April 2000 and was published under the same title. See: T.L. Hettema and A. van der Kooij, *Religious Polemics in Context* (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004).

[13] Speaking about Biblical polemics, Yairah Amit says: "The reader of Biblical literature is accustomed to polemic, since by its very nature it is a polemical literature." See Yairah Amit, "Epoch and Genre: The Sixth Century and the Growth of Hidden Polemics," in Oded Lipschitz and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds.) *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 137; Concerning Biblical religion, Stephen Geller says: "It is a minority faith, a protest, and, as such, essentially polemical." See Stephen Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.

[14] Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 45.

[15] Ibid.

into three types of anti-Judaism. He calls his first category "Prophetic anti-Judaism," which is intended to identify a critique of Judaism that comes from within Judaism itself. His second category, which he calls "Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism," includes criticism of the Jewish community for failing to accept the new belief of the Christian community that Jesus' death and resurrection are central to a correct response to God. The final category, which he calls "Gentilizing Judaism," is the most direct attack on Judaism. According to the last category, Jews were rejected as God's people and replaced by a new community – those who follow Christ.[16] These categories have generally been accepted and adapted by scholars, although some disagree with Hare's terminology. George Smiga proposes to replace the term "anti-Judaism" used by Hare with the simple term "polemics."[17] John Gager also suggests that Hare's first category, "Prophetic anti-Judaism," is misleading because it implies a negative attitude toward what is best seen as an internal debate. Gager renames the first category "intra-Jewish polemic," thereby emphasizing the nature of the polemics as an internal affair.[18]

Other scholars seek to find out the background and explain the reason for the emergence of religious polemics. Among the advantages of studying the polemical elements in the Bible is twofold. Firstly, this study helps us understand "the development of some of the movements of the Apostolic Age." Secondly, it also contributes to "a more precise understanding of the occasion and formulation of important theological themes."[19] Since the great religious figures always rejected much, as pointed by Walter Kaufmann, "we do not begin to understand them

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[16] Douglas Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in A. Davies (ed.) *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 27-47.
[17] George M. Smiga, *Pain and Polemic: Anti-Judaism in the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp.18-23.
[18] John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 9.
[19] Andrew D. Heffern, *Apology and Polemic in the New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. ix.

until we compare what they offered with what they rejected."[20] Looking at a polemical Bible commentary, Hanne Trautner-Kromann goes a bit further by saying that commentators attempt not only to explain the Biblical polemics, but also to relate them to current circumstances of life and social conditions that concern the readers and commentators.[21]

This scholarly discussion about Biblical polemics helps me frame my own approach to the Qur'ān's polemical texts. Based on the above analysis, the word "polemics" is used in this dissertation as a common term for a wide range of discourses from simply an exclusivist claim of salvation to various types of the Qur'ānic criticism of other religious communities, notably Jews and Christians. As the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions, it is no wonder that there are traces of anti-Jewish and Christian polemics in the Qur'ān. There are also a large portion of anti-pagan polemics, which reflect the believers' encounters with different religious communities and their relations with the surrounding society. It is intriguing to ask whether it is possible to interpret these polemical texts for non-polemical interactions among different religious communities. If it is possible, then: To what extent do Modern Muslim reformers succeed in doing so?

Statement of Thesis and Scope of Study

Scholars have been perplexed by the ambivalent nature of polemical and non-polemical passages of the Qur'ān, which resulted in lengthy and learned discussions about the Qur'ān's attitudes toward other religious communities. Even within Muslim scholarship there is not a single, final word on the Qur'ān's ethical position on how Muslims ought to treat the other. It is possible that

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[20] Walter Kaufmann, *Religion in Four Dimensions: Existential, Aesthetic, Historical, Comparative* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976), p.16.

[21] Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), p.5.

the ambivalence of the Qur'ān could lead someone to conclude that no coherent Qur'ānic view is possible, that the Qur'ān - like all scriptures - contains materials to justify whatever preconceived position the reader seeks to justify. The problem becomes more acute when one considers that different groups have their own "favorite" proof-texts to support their conflicting positions. For the moment, let us call those who embrace polemical texts and understand the Qur'ānic passages polemically as "exclusivists" and those who adhere to conciliatory texts as "inclusivists." This means that scripture informs the attitude each adopts towards the other. While exclusivists quote passages from the Qur'ān to support their exclusive approach and even to justify acts of violence, inclusivists also find plenty of material in the Qur'ān as proof-texts for the Islamic tradition of tolerance and regard for People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*).

What we need, in my opinion, is a scholarly endeavor to address the polemical elements of our scriptural traditions. I believe that we should address these polemical texts in order to strive for a better understanding of our faiths, to respond to the demands of the present world, and thus to contribute to progress in our communities. Until we face this problem head-on, the world will continue to be locked in an endless cycle of misunderstanding, suspicion, prejudice, hatred, and violence. Unfortunately, among scholars interested in interfaith relations, much scholarly attention has been given to the overtly "inclusive" elements of the Qur'ān and leaving the exclusive elements unexplored. Most scholars select a number of the Qur'ānic passages that can be understood as providing religious grounds for living together. When they come to the question how these verses have been understood by Muslim scholars, they prefer to look at the classical Qur'ān commentaries.

This dissertation is the first attempt to explore polemical passages of the Qur'ān through the lens of modern *tafsīr*s. The main thesis is that such a study of modern Qur'ān commentaries

reveals the degree of difficulties these reformist Muslims face in their interpretation of the scriptural polemical texts in the context that is less polemical than that of classical periods. These difficulties will increase our understanding of the complex matrix of Qur'ānic *tafsīr* and its relevance for the modern world. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the history of religions is the ongoing reinterpretation of scriptures through the process of affirmation and revision of older and authoritative exegeses. In particular, I examine to what extent Muslim reformers are succeeding in their interpretation of the Qur'an's polemical texts for non-polemical fashion.

My approach in this regard challenges a common assumption in studies of Qur'ān commentaries: namely that *tafsīr* has not changed throughout history. Scholars of *tafsīr* often construe that modern Qur'ān commentaries do not depart significantly from the patterns and approaches of classical *tafsīr*. In 1956, Harris Birkeland asserted that "It is superfluous to consult other commentaries than those mentioned above," namely Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī and Rāzī.[22] He furher argued, "With ar-Rāzī the productive Muslim *tafsīr* has come to an end. Later commentators chiefly copy and rearrange or make abridgements of older works."[23] Such an unsubstantiated claim has been repeated over and again by contemporary scholars. Rotraud Wielandt writes "Many Qur'ān commentaries of this time hardly differ from older ones in the methods applied and the kinds of explanations given. The majority of the authors of such commentaries made ample use of classical sources like Zamakhsharī (d.538/1144), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606/1210), and Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) without necessarily adding anything

[22] Harris Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam* (Oslo: I Kommisjon Hos H. Aschehoug & Co., 1956), p. 136.
[23] Ibid., p. 137.

substantially new to the already available interpretation."[24] In his study of modern *tafsīr* in Egypt, J.J.G. Jansen concludes "Modern Egyptian commentaries are thus still part or the great tradition of classical *tafsīr.*"[25]

However, a recent study by Karen A. Bauer seems to question the view that later *mufassirūn* have just copied and repeated earlier sources. Bauer has successfully demonstrated that the relation between *tafsīr* and its sources is not as straightforward as is sometimes supposed. She argues that "the exegetes' individual judgement and the mores of their time carried a greater weight in determining exegesis than did the elements commonly considered to be its sources."[26] In her study of four key verses in the Qur'ān that describe the nature of women and the relationship between the sexes, Bauer questions the common view that the Qur'ān, earlier *tafsīr*s and prophetic sayings have determined pre-modern Qur'ān interpretation. My examination of modern *tafsīr* supports this conclusion. As will be discussed in detail in the last section of this Introduction, most Muslim reformers expressed their critical stance to the medieval *tafsīr*, especially that of Rāzī. They might have referred to the earlier *tafsīr*, yet they often developed their own interpretations to make the Qur'ān relevant in their times and places. Thus, the above characterization of modern *tafsīr* as presenting nothing new is not true at all. Throughout this dissertation I hope to demonstrate that, while explicating a number of polemical passages, Muslim reformers have critically engaged with both the "classical sources" and the modern contexts.

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[24] Rotraud Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary," in Jane McAuliffe (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), vol.2, p. 124.
[25] J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 96.
[26] Karen A. Bauer, *Room for Interpretation: Qur'ānic Exegesis and Gender* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2008), p. iii.

By focusing on modern Muslim scholars, this dissertation seeks to answer two related questions: How do modern contexts shape their understanding of the pre-modern worldview of the Qur'ān? And how does their close reading of classical Qur'ān commentaries influence their approaches to modern realities? What I intend to show is the dynamics of continuity and change within the exegetical tradition. Muslim reformers whose ideas and thoughts constitute the main thrust of this study wrote voluminous Qur'ān commentaries and were known, at least in their times and places, for their reform ideas. For this dissertation, I select six modern Qur'ān commentaries written by Muslim reformers, namely, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d.1914) from Syria; *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Rashīd Riḍā (d.1935) from Egypt; *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (d.1958) from India; *al-Tafsīr al-Kāshif* by Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (d.1979) from Lebanon; *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī (d.1981) from Iran; *Tafsīr al-Azhar* by Haji 'Abd al-Malik Karim Amrullah, known as Hamka (d.1981) from Indonesia. Since any textually-based study such as this may be questioned for not giving a fair representation to different streams of Islamic thought, I need to explain my criteria for this selection and situate these authors within a larger context of Islamic reform. First of all, let me state at the outset that not many reformist Muslims formally wrote Qur'ān commentaries. Therefore, I limit my object of study to those Muslim scholars who wrote Qur'ān commentaries as their *magnum opus* in their intellectual life. For this reason, I exclude a number of well-known Muslim reformers who do not formally write Qur'ān commentaries.

To keep this dissertation at a reasonable size, I have to limit myself to a few themes which I consider basic and central to an understanding of the polemics of the Qur'ān against other religions. Chapter 1 discusses the nature of the polemics of the Qur'ān against other religions. As is known, the Qur'ān contains a considerable number of Jewish and Christian

teachings that led modern scholars to argue that the Prophet formulated his new religion eclectically through his contact with the Jews and the Christians. While this chapter examines this "borrowing" theory critically, the main focus is to look closely at how the Qur'ān addresses other religions in both ecumenical and polemical terms. Who are the intended audience of these polemical texts? If the scriptural polemic originally used to establish the new religion's identity, can it be interpreted differently in different contexts?

Chapter 2 discusses reformist Muslim interpretation of those verses that have usually been understood as proof-texts of the superiority of Islam over all other religions. While there are Qur'ānic verses (e.g. 2:62; 5:48; 5:69) that seem to extend salvation to other religions, a number of verses clearly limit the salvific promise to Islam as the only true religion. The Qur'ān says: "*Verily, the religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the Book did not disagree among themselves, except after certain knowledge came to them, out of envy among themselves. Whoever disbelieves in the signs of God, verily God is swift in calling to account*" (3:19); "*Whoever desires other religion than Islam, there will not be accepted of him*" (3:85); "*This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and approved Islam as a religion for you*" (5:3).[27] These verses have been commonly invoked in support of the theology of exclusivist salvation.

Chapter 3 examines the notion of the falsification of previous scriptures. The Qur'ān recognizes the divine origin of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Yet, there are a number of verses that refer to certain "distortions" of the scriptures by some groups of the People of the Book. Terms used for this vary, but the most obvious is *taḥrīf,* which is generally translated as

[27] As for the translation of the Qur'ānic verses throughout this dissertation, I have consulted the works of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Arthur J. Arberry, Muhammad Asad, and Marmaduke Pickthall. However, in most cases, I use the translation by Arberry with some modifications.

"falsification," "alteration" or "corruption." There are four Qur'ānic verses that use derivatives of the term *taḥrīf.* For instance, "*But because of their breach of their covenant, We curse them, and made their hearts grow hard; they distort the words (yuḥarrifūna al-kalima) from their [right] places and forget a good part of what was sent to them"* (5:13). See also 2:75; 4:46 and 5:41. The Qur'ān also talks about Jewish and Christian distortion of their scriptures either with their hand (2:79) or with their tongue (3:78). Perhaps, the Qur'ānic charge of Jewish and Christian scriptures is the most common topic that has been used over centuries by Muslim polemicists against Judaism and Christianity.

Chapter 4 addresses the Qur'ānic denials of sonship, human-divinity and the Trinity. As for the question of sonship, this chapter discusses the Qur'ānic verse that denies the divine sonship of 'Uzayr and Jesus (Q.9:30) along with other verse that denies the Jewish and Christian claim that they are the children of God (Q.5:18). The Qur'ān also strongly criticizes the Christians who claim that God is the Messiah. Two verses in the Qur'ān (Q.5:17 and 72) begin with "*la-qad kafar al-ladhīna qālū inna Allah huwa al-masīḥ ibn maryam*" (They disbelieve who say "God is the Messiah, the son of Mary). The Qur'ān also speaks of the three gods in three verses (4:169; 5:75, and 76) and gives the impression that Mary is one of the three. "*God said, 'O Jesus son of Mary, did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God?*'" (Q.116). Since this suggestion is not based on any recognized conception of the Trinity in the Christian Church, it is instructive to know how modern Muslim scholars who, I assume, have sufficient access to the teachings of the mainstream Christianity address the polemics of the Qur'ān against the doctrine of Trinity.

Chapter 5 discusses the Qur'ānic restriction on inter-religious interactions. The question of trusting and befriending the Jews, Christians or people of any other religions is restricted in a

number of the Qur'ānic passages. The most quoted verse is, "*And the Jews and Christians will not be pleased with you unless you follow their form of religion (millatihim)"* (2:120). Several verses prohibit Muslims to develop friendly relationship with Jews and Christians. In sūra al-Mā'ida (5) 51, it is said: "*O believers, do not take the Jews and the Christians as awliyā'; they are awliyā' of each other. Whoever of you who takes them as his awliyā' is one of them. God indeed does not guide the wrongdoers*." The world "*awliyā'*" (plural of "*walī*") can be translated differently as "friends", "allies", "legal guardians", "protectors" or "leaders." In sūra al-Mā'ida alone this prohibition is repeated in verses 57 and 81. The Qur'ān sometimes uses the term "*kuffār*" (unbelievers), instead of Jews and Christians (4: 89, 139 and 144). Certainly, the frequent occurrence of this prohibition is indicative of the seriousness of the matter, at least at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the question then: How have these verses been understood by Muslim reformers?

Islamic Reform, *Tafsīr,* and Religious Diversity

The first basic question to discuss here is: Who are the reformist Muslims whose *tafsīr* constitutes the object study of this dissertation? The use of the term "reformist Muslim" needs a justification because scholars often call a certain key figure with such a different label as "reformist" or "modernist." For instance, scholars have used various terms to designate Islamic trend associated with Muḥammad 'Abduh (d.1905), Rashīd Riḍā (d.1935), and their followers.[28] Charles Adams refers to this intellectual trend in Egypt as Islamic modernism and its adherent as

[28] Hamilton A. R. Gibb notes that 'Abduh's reformist program comprises four major issues: the purification of Islam from corrupting influences; educational reforms; reinterpretation of Islamic doctrines in the light of modern thought; and the defense of Islam against European influences and Christian attacks. See H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 33. See also, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [1962]), pp. 130-160.

modernist Muslims. Adams defines Islamic modernism as "an attempt to free the religion of Islam from the shackles of too rigid orthodoxy and to accomplish reforms which will render it adaptable to the complex demands of modern life."[29] Fazlur Rahman emphasizes the use of reason as one of the main characteristics of modernist Muslim approach to the Qur'ān.[30] According to Adams and Rahman's theoretical framework, 'Abduh and his followers were modernists in the sense that they attempted to make Islam compatible with modernity.

Hisham Sharabi, on the other hand, prefers to identify 'Abduh's stream of thinking with Islamic reformism rather than Islamic modernism. According to Sharabi, one should distinguish between the two intellectual categories. There are, at least, two reasons of why Islamic reformism should not be confused with Islamic modernism. First, the major concern of reformism is to safeguard Islam by rejuvinizing the dynamic element of the Islamic tradition, whereas modernism derives its central assumption not from Islamic tradition but from Western thought. Second, even if reformism may be called Islamic modernism, "reformism was modernizing only in a special sense and a limited degree."[31] In Sharabi's words, "Reformism was the movement of the younger liberal 'ulama who knew that Islam, to be properly defended, had to overcome its inertia and be revitalized."[32] Thus, he classifies 'Abduh's line of thinking as Islamic reformism, which was disseminated mainly by Riḍā "through his monthly journal, *al-*

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[29] Charles Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad 'Abduh* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), p. 1.
[30] Fazlur Rahman, "Revival and Reform in Islam," in P.M. Holt, et al. (eds.) *Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 645. See also Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), p.49-50.
[31] Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 7.
[32] Ibid.

Manār, which was probably the most important reformist periodical in the Muslim world for over thirty-five years."[33]

Without delving into further details of the terminology debates, I will be referring to ʻAbduh-led intellectual trends as the Islamic reform, primarily because they often call themselves reformers (*muṣliḥūn*). The basic principle of my criteria of selecting these modern Qur'ān commentaries is not only because they were influential in their times and places, but also because they represented the modern trend of Islamic reform in different parts of the Muslim world. It must be stated at the outset that although ʻAbduh's reform project has had enormous influences on later Muslim thinking in many parts of the Muslim word, his is not the only model of Islamic reform. Scholars such as Charles Adams, Malcolm Kerr and Nikki Keddie have focused their studies on three figures, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ʻAbduh, and Rashīd Riḍā.[34] Even though each of these reformers had different ideas and concerns, there exists a tendency to trace the genealogy of Islamic reform to the three reformers: Afghānī, ʻAbduh and Riḍā. However, more recent studies by David Commins, Itzchak Weismann, Basheer Nafi and others have demonstrated that the vision of Islamic reform advocated by Damascene reform-minded Muslims is different from that of Afghānī-ʻAbduh-Riḍā.[35] For instance, although the Syrian reformer Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī had some contact with ʻAbduh's guild of reformism, he seems to derive his idea of reform from a different strain of Islamic reformism.

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[33] Ibid., p. 24.

[34] See Charles Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad ʻAbduh* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968); Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ʻAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (University of California Press, 1966); Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

[35] See, for instance, David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Iztchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in late Ottoman Damascus,* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Basheer M. Nafi, "Abū al-Thanā' al-Alūsī: an ʻĀlim, Ottoman Muftī, and Exegete of the Qur'ān," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): pp. 465-494.

Qāsimī was born in 1866 in Damascus to a family of ‘ulama and, in due time, became the most proponent religious reformer in late Ottoman Syria.[36] Iztchak Weismann, a respected scholar of Islamic religious movements during this period, rightly calls Qāsimī "the mouthpiece of the early Damascene Salafiyya."[37] Qāsimī studied with the prestigious ‘ulama and Sufis of his time. Following the usual course taken by the children of ‘ulama, he began memorizing the Qur'ān and then he studied classical *tafsīr*. At the age of 20, he was appointed as the Shāfi‘ī prayer leader at the ‘Annabah mosque. He began establishing an intellectual network with a number of reform-minded scholars not only in Syria but also abroad.[38] It was such an intellectual environment in Damascus that led Qāsimī to turn to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. He often corresponded with the reformist Alūsī family of Baghdad, and with ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā in Egypt. In 1903 he, along with Baytār, visited Egypt and met with both of them. During the four-week stay in Cairo, he saw ‘Abduh frequently and attended a number of his lessons at al-Azhar.

Seen from the networks of scholars that he established and engaged, it seems clear that Qāsimī did not derive his vision of reform from Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā as Skovgaard-Peterson claims.[39] Instead, his inspiration and aspiration for Islamic reform came more directly from the Alūsī family in Baghdad, with whom he had associated before he made the acquaintance of ‘Abduh and Riḍā. The importance of the Alūsī family on Qāsimī's thought is evident in some of the new published correspondence between him and Maḥmūd Shukrī Alūsī

[36] Nizār Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: Aḥad ‘ulamā’ al-iṣlāḥ al-ḥadīth fī al-Shām* (Damascus: Dār al-qalam, 1997), p. 67.
[37] Iztchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 143.
[38] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: Aḥad ‘ulamā’ al-iṣlāḥ al-ḥadīth fī al-Shām,* pp. 108-109.
[39] Skovgaard-Peterson says: "The Syrian scholar, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914) is one of the most important representatives in Damascus of the well-known reform movement, Salafiya, which derives from Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh." See Jakob Skovgaard-Peterson, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwās of the Dār al-Iftā* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 84.

(d.1924).[40] Based on his findings that the Alūsīs and reform-minded Muslims in Damascus shared a common program for reforming religious practices, David Commins concludes that "a more likely source for Damascene reformers, including Qāsimī, lay in Baghdad's renowned Alūsī family."[41] My own study of Qāsimī's approach to Ibn 'Arabī's idea of *waḥda al-wujūd* (unity of being) seems to support Commins' conclusion. Abū al-Thanā al-Alūsī (d.1854) who was generally claimed as "one of the influential ancestors of modern Salafiyya"[42] and his son Nu'mān al-Alūsī (d.1899) held a positive assessment of the idea of *waḥda al-wujūd* similar to that of Qāsimī.[43]

Among the reformist circles of Damascus at that time, Qāsimī was the most prolific writer. It is reported that he wrote more than a hundred books, chief among them a Qur'ān commentary called *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* and a *ḥadith* work entitled *Qawā'id al-taḥdīth*. One of the distinct features of Qāsimī's works is the synthesis between his engagement with the classical sources and the project of re-thinking Islam in the modern context. This is mainly done through the emphasis on *ijtihād* (personal reasoning) and *ra'y* (reason). In fact, Qāsimī was accused by a number of official 'ulama of advocating an independent *madhhab* known as the "madhhab Jamālī", that is, his own legal school apart from the four recognized *madhhab*s.[44] One should also notice from Qāsimī's intellectual legacy that an instrumental conception of reason pervades his writings. As Commins puts it, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī's thought shows how a Muslim

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[40] See: Muḥammad ibn Nāsir al-'Ajamī (ed.), *al-Rasā'il al-mutabādila bayna Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī* (Beirut: Dār al-bashāir al-Islāmiyya, 2001).

[41] David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 24.

[42] Basheer M. Nafi, "Abū al-Thanā' al-Alūsī: an Ālim, Ottoman Muftī, and Exegete of the Qur'ān," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002), p. 466.

[43] See Mun'im Sirry, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafi Approach to Sufism," *Die Welt des Islams* 57 (2010): pp. 75-108.

[44] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: Aḥad 'ulamā' al-iṣlāḥ al-ḥadīth fī al-Shām*, p. 116; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 50-55.

thinker came to grips with the contemporary European stress on reason by reviving dormant elements of the Islamic intellectual heritage."[45] The *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, Qāsimī's magnum opus, represents exactly this attempt to re-actualize the Muslim intellectual heritage in the modern context.

Many aspects of his *tafsīr* remain unstudied, including his view of other religions. As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, Qāsimī developed quite surprisingly a positive attitude toward other religions, notably Judaism and Christianity. While most modern *mufassirūn* rejected materials of Jewish and Christian origins, commonly known as *isrā'īliyyāt*,[46] Qāsimī accepted them for supplementary attestation (*lil-istishhād*) in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This position is in line with that of earlier *mufassirūn* such as Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.[47] What distinguishes Qāsimī from other *mufassirūn* is that he includes in his discussion of *isrā'īliyyāt* the question of the authenticity of Jewish and Christian scriptures. It seems that, for Qāsimī, these two issues are interrelated to each other. He relates the tradition "*ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl wa-lā ḥaraj*" (Narrate [traditions] concerning the Children of Israel and there is nothing

[45] Commins, *Islamic Reform,* p. 66.

[46] *Isrā'īliyyāt* is a term that is often mentioned in the Qur'ānic exegesis to refer to Biblical stories which was collected in medieval *tafsīr* and *tarīkh* collections. Calder suggests that the term *isrā'īliyyāt* entered into exegetical terminology with Ibn Kathīr to designate material collected by previous generation of exegetes to which objections were raised. See Norman Calder, "*Tafsīr* from Tabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with the reference to the story of Abraham," in eds. GR Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur'ān,* (London, 1993), p. 137. Andrew Rippin deals with this issue in the same book, saying: "the rise and employment of this term *isrā'īliyyāt* deserves a special study; my impression is that it comes into wide circulation as a pejorative term is *tafsīr* – material which is not to be accepted as valid in interpretation – only with … Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr." See Andrew Rippin, "Interpreting the Bible through the Qur'ān," in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef (eds.) *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 258. For an extensive discussion on the *isrā'īliyyāt*, see Ismail Albayrak, "Qur'ānic Narrative and *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Western and in Classical Exegesis" (PhD Dissertation, University of Leeds, 2000).

[47] In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, after mentioning the Prophetic tradition sanctioning the transmission of the stories of the Children of Israel, Ibn Kathir asserts that "these *al-aḥadīth al-isrā'īliyya*… are quoted for supplementary attestation, not for the basis of creed (*lā lil-i'tiqād*)." See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 1998), vol. 1, p. 9. I think Jane McAuliffe's translation of *lā lil-i'tiqād* as "not for full support" is wrong. See Jane McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in Andrew Rippins (ed.) *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 57.

objectionable [in that]),[48] and at the same time he discusses the Prophet's friendly treatment of Jews, including his attestation with the Torah on a number of issues such as the punishment of adultery. From the Damascene scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348), Qāsimī cites a tradition in which Abdullāh ibn Salām's father came to the Prophet, saying: "I used to read the Qur'ān and the Torah at the same time." The Prophet suggested: "Read this in one night and this in another."[49]

Qāsimī contends that those Muslims who refused to read the Torah were because they considered it as having been falsified. The question of scriptural falsification (*taḥrīf*) will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. It suffices to say here that Qāsimī cites a number of sources to demonstrate the reliability of the Torah. Interestingly, he finds the support for his view even from the most traditionalist scholars such as the *muḥaddith* al-Bukhārī (d.256/870) who narrates Ibn 'Abbās' explanation of the meaning of *taḥrīf*, that is, falsification in terms of interpretation.[50] Among later Muslim scholars that Qāsimī refers to approvingly is al-Biqā'ī (d.885/1480) who wrote a book in defense of the Bible entitled *al-Aqwāl al-qawīma fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīma* (The Just Verdict on the Permissibility of Quoting from Old Scriptures).[51] This book was written by Biqā'ī to defend this decision to quote the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels, in their official Arabic translation, in his massive *tafsīr* entitled *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa al-suwar,* which the scholar of *tafsīr* Walid A. Saleh calls it "the only Qur'ān commentary that I know of that contains extensive verbatim quotations from the

[48] For a good discussion on this tradition, see M.J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an Early Tradition," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): pp. 215-239.
[49] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl,* vol.1, pp. 43-44.
[50] Ibid., p. 49.
[51] For a critical edition of this book, see Walid A. Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

Bible."[52] Qāsimī's reference to Biqā'ī is telling, because the latter was accused by his enemies, especially the Egyptian scholar al-Sakhāwī (d.902/1492), of heresy for his break with the tradition. Biqā'ī did not want to let this accusation of heresy go unanswered, and this book was the result of his attempt to defend his position.[53]

Rashīd Riḍā's project of reform is undoubtedly indebted to 'Abduh to an extent that scholars tend to call him "a leading heir to ['Abduh's] reformist movement."[54] He devoted much of his intellectual life to disseminate his mentor's ideas of reform,[55] although some cast doubt on his being 'Abduh's spiritual heir because "the doctrine of 'Abduh suffered a certain change at the hands of his follower."[56] Riḍā was born in Tripoli (then Syria and now Lebanon) in 1865 to a parent with a tradition of learning and piety.[57] His fascination with the idea of Islamic reform began when he came across issues of the short-lived journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā,* published by Afghānī and 'Abduh during their exile in Paris.[58] In 1897, Riḍā left his birthplace for Egypt and soon became a disciple of 'Abduh. A few months later he embarked upon publishing the first issue of his journal *al-Manār,* the name that he later used for his monumental *tafsīr.* When this *tafsīr* was serialized in the journal *al-Manār* from 1901 (vol. 4), it was simply called "*Tafsīr al-*

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[52] Walid A. Saleh, "'Sublime in Its Style, Exquite in Its Tenderness': The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā'ī's Qur'ān Commentary," in Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stren (eds.) *Adaptations and Innovations* (Paris: Peeters, 2007), p. 331.
[53] For a further discussion of Biqā'ī's treatise, see Walid A. Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā'ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān," *Speculum* 83/3 (2008): pp. 629-654.
[54] Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates (1898-1935)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 4.
[55] Referring to the establishment of the journal *al-Manār* by Riḍā, Charles Adams says: "the periodical founded by Rashīd Riḍā as the mouthpiece for the propagation of 'Abduh's doctrines and the accomplishment of his reform." See Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 177.
[56] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, p. 226.
[57] Ibid., p. 224.
[58] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 11. On this, Charles Adams wrote: "[Riḍā] once happened upon a number of old copies [of *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*] which were in possession of his father. These he devoured with great eagerness, and then began the search, from house to house, for the remaining numbers which, when found, he copied out with own hands. He was able to complete the numbers as many as had been published, from copies in the possession of Shaykh Husain al-Jisr. The articles in these papers made a profound impression upon him and caused, as he says, to enter upon a new peiod in his life." See Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt,* pp. 178-179.

Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm", and was later published as a separate multi-volume title named *Tafsīr al-Manār.* We are told that Riḍā was able to convince ʻAbduh to make exegesis of the Qur'ān the subject of his lectures at al-Azhar. In the journal *al-Manār,* Riḍā wrote the following statement before he began his *tafsīr*: "[The following is] adapted from lectures delivered at al-Azhar by *al-ustādh al-imām* shaykh ʻAbduh." This statement has misled many scholars to assume that the authorship of *Tafsīr al-Manār* was that of ʻAbduh and Riḍā. From the time of Ignaz Goldziher on, it has been common to attribute the work to ʻAbduh and to mention Riḍā in the second role of scribe.[59] Even in more recent studies such as that of Jane McAuliffe, the authorship of *Tafsīr al-Manār* is only reversed as the work of Riḍā first then of ʻAbduh.[60]

In my view, it is not accurate to say as Helmut Gatje writes "Muḥammad ʻAbduh presented his Qur'ānic exegesis in the form of lectures at al-Azhar University and within the scope of legal opinion (*fatāwā*, sing. *fatwā*) which were published separately as in the periodical, *al-Manār* ("The Lighthouse"), and later, with the author's approval, were compiled, revised from a literary viewpoint, and continued by Muḥammad ʻAbduh's pupil, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā."[61] A closer reading of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* reveals that this is not a simple record of the lectures given by ʻAbduh. Of course we find paragraphs where he refers to ʻAbduh's lectures either in the form of quotation (*qāla al-ustādh al-imām*) or in the form of contents (*qāla mā maʻnāhu*). Yet,

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[59] See Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung,* p. 325. For an English version, see Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators,* trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz verlag, 2006), pp. 205-206.

[60] McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* p. 78. It has often been argued that Abduh's actual share in this *tafsīr* consists of a series of lectures that he gave at al-Azhar around the year 1900 which covered the text of the Qur'ān from the beginning to Q. 4:124. Riḍā took notes of these lectures which he afterwards colaborated and showed to his teacher's approval or correction. See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 15. In addition, he complemented the passages based on ʻAbduh's lectures by inserting explanations which he marked as his own – and in which he displayed a more traditionalist attitude than that of ʻAbduh. After ʻAbduh's death, Riḍā continued the commentary on his own to Q. 12:107. See Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du Manār; tendances modernes de l'exégèse coranique en Égypte* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1954).

[61] Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations,* trans. Alford T. Welch (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 42.

Riḍā always gave additional explanations, and on several occasions extended comments on his own line of arguments. Therefore, there is no reason why the authorship of *Tafsīr al-Manār* should be attributed to other than Riḍā. Perhaps, by referring to his mentor's lectures it was expected to give more weights to his *tafsīr.*

Most studies on Riḍā's view of other religions, especially Christianity, focus on a polemical side of his attitudes toward Christian missionaries. As early as 1920, Goldziher noted that Christian missionary activities and their polemical writings against Islam "produced a forceful reaction in *al-Manār.*"[62] Charles Adams argued that *al-Manār* placed particular emphasis on "counteracting the activities of Christian mission in Muslim land" by forming *Jam'iyyat al-da'wa wa al-irshād* (society of propaganda and guidance).[63] Recent studies by Simon Wood and Umar Ryad also emphasize the polemical nature of Riḍā's works. While Wood focuses on Riḍā's work *Shubahāt al-naṣārā wa ḥujaj al-Islām,* which was previously published as a series of articles in *al-Manār,* as a response to the activities and publications of Christian missionaries in Egypt, Ryad analyses three major issues, namely (1) *al-Manār*'s view of Christianity, (2) Riḍā's relation with his fellow Arab Christians, and (3) his response to Christian missionary writings on Islam.[64] This dissertation offers a different picture of Riḍā's view of other religions in a sense that, at least on the selected verses in his *tafsīr,* he is much less polemical than is sometimes supposed. It is hardly surprising, however, because the *tafsīr* is the fruit of protracted study and meditation, pursued over many years, whereas many of his articles respond mostly to definite contemporary events, provocations, challenges, or questions posed to him.

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[62] Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung,* p. 342; Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, p. 215.
[63] Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 196.
[64] See Simon Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍā's Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2008); Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformation and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates (1898-1935).*

The *Tafsīr al-Manār* has a tremendous influence on the Indonesian Muslim reformer Hamka, who named his *tafsīr* after one of the oldest Muslim institutions of learning, Al-Azhar. Hamka was born in Minangkabau, Sumatra, in 1908 to a well respected family of ‘ulama reformers. His father, Dr. ‘Abd al-Karim Amrullah was a reformist scholar (*kaum muda ‘ulama*) who co-founded the reformist journal *al-Munīr,*[65] similar to *al-Manār* founded by Riḍā. In fact, *al-Munīr* published several translated versions of articles appeared previously in *al-Manār.*[66] Sometimes the editor of *al-Munīr* requested a *fatwā* (opinion on legal issues) from Riḍā to clarify certain contestious issues, including the question of whether or not Muslims were allowed to wear western clothes, which traditionalist ‘ulama in Sumatra vehemently opposed. Apparently, according to some of these ‘ulama, imitating western clothes and life styles was considered heretical act (*bid‘a*). The editor of *al-Munīr* asked whether or not Islam prescribes specific clothing for Muslims.[67] Hamka grew up in this kind of reformist environment, and this circle of Islamic reform and the social rubric created by his father had a tremendous influence on his attitudes toward the traditional ‘ulama and *adat* (custom) authorities.

At the age of sixteen he traveled to Java (Yogyakarta) and there he came into contact with H.O.S. Cokroaminoto who taught Islam and Socialism, R.M. Suryopranoto who taught Sociology, H. Fakhruddin, a leader of Muḥammadiyah, the largest reformist organization, who taught *Agama Islam* (Islamic sciences), and Ki Bagus Hadikusumo from whom Hamka learned *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān.* During his stay in Yogyakarta, he joined and participated in the struggle of

[65] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1982), p. 7.

[66] On the content of *al-Munīr,* Deliar Noer writes: “Sometimes the articles were written as an answer to questions submitted by readers. There were also translated articles from Middle East journals, including *al-Manār* of Egypt.” See Deliar Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movement 1990-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 40.

[67] See *al-Manār* 14 (1911): pp. 669-675. For a discussion on this inquiry for a *fatwā*, See Jajat Burhanudin, “Aspiring for Islamic Reform: Southeast Asian Requests for *Fatwā*s in *al-Manār*,” *Islamic Law and Society* 12/1 (2005): pp. 9-26.

Jong Islamieten Bond (The Young Muslims Union).[68] The influence of these encounters with modern scholars, modern subjects, and new social organizations should not be overlooked, since such an environment fits quite well with Hamka's interest. Unlike his hometown Minangkabau where it lacked social heterogeneity, in Yogyakarta he encountered what he called "a new form of Islam," by which he meant "Islam as something alive, which in turn produces the dynamic understandings and activities of Islam."[69] Moreover, he argued that this "new form of Islam" was able to address modern social and cultural problems. What makes Islam in Yogyakarta dynamic, according to Hamka, was because of the challenges posed by other religions. Indeed, Yogyakarta was multi-religious and multi-ethnic and Islam had to adapt to this diversity.[70]

He went to Mecca in 1927 with the intention of staying for many years to study Islam and Arabic. To support his stay in Mecca, he worked in the printing company of the father-in-law of Haji Ahmad Khatib, his father's former teacher. Perhaps, because of his communicative skill in Arabic, he was appointed the head of the Indonesian delegation to King ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz al-Saʻūd who conquered Mecca in 1923.[71] However, Hamka did not stay long in Mecca. He decided to return home, began his career as a journalist and became an active preacher for the Muḥammadiyah. After Indonesian independence, he moved to Jakarta, the capital of the new republic, and he soon received a wide recognition for his numerous books. He became the imam of the al-Azhar mosque, named after he received an honorary degree from al-Azhar University in

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[68] Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar: Qur'ānic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change* (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1997), p. 142.
[69] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, p. 56.
[70] Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p. 144.
[71] Ibid., p. 146.

1958.[72] This mosque was also the birthplace of his magnum opus, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, which he initially delivered as a series of morning lectures on *tafsīr.* To date, Hamka's *tafsīr* remains the most influential Qur'ān commentary in the Malay-Indonesian world. As Howard Federspiel notes, "Hamka is unique in referring to events occurring in twentieth-century Indonesia and, occasionally, elsewhere, as illustrating Qur'ānic principles."[73] His interest in Islamic reform is evident in all his works, especially in his *tafsīr,* in which he elucidates the Qur'ānic verses and at the same time addresses local social and religious problems.[74] Hamka's admiration for 'Abduh's idea of reform is evident from the fact that a few months before he was chosen as the first scholar to receive an honorary degree from al-Azhar, he presented a public lecture there entitled "The influence of Muḥammad 'Abduh in Indonesia."[75] A few years later, he began publishing his *tafsīr* under the title "*Tafsīr al-Azhar*."

Hamka's view of other religions is complicated. While none of his numerous works seems to suggests his confrontational attitudes to other religions, there was a controversial *fatwā* issued in 1981 by the Council of Indonesian 'Ulama (MUI) which gave the impression of his negative image in the eyes of Indonesian progressive Muslims. He was the first chairman of the MUI since its inception in 1975, therefore when the *fatwā* declaring *ḥarām* (forbidden) for Muslims to attend Christmas celebrations sparked a controversy Hamka was the first person to

[72] In 1974, Hamka also received an honorary degree from the National University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. See H. Rusydi Hamka, "Hamka: Kepribadian, Sejarah dan Perjuangan," in Sidek Baba (ed.) *Pemikiran Hamka* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2008), p. 10.
[73] Howard Federspiel, "An Introduction to Qur'ānic Commentaries in Contemporary Southeast Asia," *The Muslim World* 81/2 (1991), p. 152.
[74] On his study of *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Was Yusof concludes: "In sum, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* is an extensive work of Qur'ān commentary which covers non-religion subjects as well as religious ones. This detailed exposition creates the tendency to overstretch the limits and the obvious meanings of the verses." See Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar: Qur'ānic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change*, p. 181.
[75] Hamka, *Pengaruh Muḥammad 'Abduh di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1961). See also M. Yunan Yusuf, *Corak Pemikiran Kalam Tafsīr al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1990), p. 49.

defend it.[76] Reactions to the *fatwā* came not only from the Christian community and progressive Muslims, but also from the government as the latter viewed it disadvantageous to its effort to build religious tolerance after the conflicts of the late 1960s. As he was under pressure, Hamka resigned from the chairmanship of the MUI.[77] Seen from his works and political careers, Hamka does not seem to be a confrontationist type of religious scholar. He was once working as an advisor to the Japanese authority on issues pertaining to Islam and Muslims. During the New Order Suharto regime, he first opposed the establishment of the MUI but later he welcomed it and was appointed as its first chairman. He also had keen interest in Sufism as he wrote *Tasauf Moderen* (Modern Sufism) in 1939 and *Tasauf: Pekembangan dan Pemurniannya* (Sufism: Its Development and Purification) in 1983. Therefore, his defense of the *fatwā* must be read in the context of the widespread rumors about Christianization activities, including the use of Christmas celebrations to convert Muslims.[78]

The Indian reformer Abul Kalam Azad found a rich heritage of Islamic intellectualism and reformism in India, especially in the works of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d.1898) and the eighteenth-century Muslim reformer Shah Waliullah al-Dahlawi (d.1762). Azad was born in Mecca in 1888 to his Indian father and Arab mother. His initial name was Mohiuddin Ahmad. He was only two or three years old when his father returned to India. Azad was educated at home by his father in a strictly traditional manner, but he rebelled against his father's stern discipline. He liked to think of his pen name "Azad" (free) as indicating his break from the religious

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[76] For a detailed discussion of this controversial *fatwā*, see Mun'im Sirry, "Fatwas and Their Controversy: The Case of the Council of Indonesian Ulama," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (forthcoming, 2012).

[77] See Mohamad Atho Mudzhar, *Fatwās of the Council of Indonesian 'Ulama: A Study of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia, 1975-1988* (PhD Dissertation, UCLA, 1990), p. 129.

[78] For further discussion of the *fatwā* and the rumors of Christianization activities, see Mohamad Atho Mudzhar, "The Council of Indonesian 'Ulama on Muslims' Attendance at Christmas Celebration," in Muḥammad Khalid Masud et al (eds.) *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwās* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 230-241.

orthodoxy of his family.[79] At the early age, he was exposed to the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, especially the latter's rationalist approach to Islam. Azad himself recounted his encounter with Sir Sayyid's writings: "At the time when I came in contact with the writings of Sir Sayyid, a completely new world was opened to me…. In six months I went through all the writings of Sir Sayyid and felt that I had suddenly landed in a strange, higher and loftier world. I vividly remember that (during those days) I, all the time, found myself in a state of ecstasy."[80]

The primary influence of Sir Sayyid was in supporting Azad's struggle to be free from his parent's religious orthodoxy. It turned out, however, Sir Sayyid's ideas could not satisfy him for long. His mind was further assailed by intellectual doubts and he began to question the entire basis of religion and its place in life. Azad points out that from the age of fourteen he was torn by religious conflicts for about nine years. About the state of his mental tension, he wrote:

> I reached the stage which normally occurs: denial of the tenets of the faith. The result of all the involvement in scholastic theology, in criticism of basic dogma and the study of the rival schools of thought all this produced a new restlessness. The intervening peace derived by following Sayyid Ahmad Khan's direction was only delusion of mind. Underneath, I never found peace.[81]

The second most influential figure in Azad's intellectual life was the Egyptian reformer 'Abduh. He read 'Abduh's *Risāla al-tawḥīd* and also saw *al-Manār* regularly. Perhaps, Abduh's influence was more endurance than that of Sir Sayyid. Azad's initial admiration for *al-Manār* in around 1901 was because of its literary style. But by 1912 when he published his own Urdu weekly *al-Hilāl,* his admiration was much deeper for the reform ideas of 'Abduh and Riḍā. In the first three issues of *al-Hilāl*, Azad wrote a series of articles introducing Abduh's ideas of reform.

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[79] Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, eds. Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 2.
[80] See I.H. Azad Faruqi, *The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of Maulana Abu'l-Kalam Azad's Approach to the Understanding of the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), pp. 30-31.
[81] Cited by V.N. Datta, *Maulana Azad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 20.

As one author asserts "Azad's *al-Hilāl* [is] almost echoing the ideology of the *Manār* group, particularly of 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā."[82]

However, the most influential figure that shaped Azad's idea of reform was Dahlawi, perhaps the most celebrated Indian Muslim reformer whose influence crosses beyond the national boundaries. Azad's ancestors were among the disciples of Dahlawi's successors, and Azad acknowledged Dahlawi as an intellectual forebear, noting that he had struggled with his writings in his youth and had only appreciated them later.[83] When talking about Azad's *tafsīr*, known as *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* Ian Henderson Douglas notes:

> Azad's claim to be a successor to Shah Waliullah is the key to understanding the purpose of the *Tarjumān.* Shah Waliullah had wanted to make the Qur'ān intelligible to the ordinary intellect, since it was necessary for the success of his religious and political programme. Azad identified with this tradition when he saw the need for ordinary Indian Muslim to be inspired afresh by the Qur'ān in ordering all aspects of his life.[84]

What motivates Azad to write his *tafsīr* and what accounts for his inclusive understanding of religious diversity which characterizes his *tafsīr*? In the first issue of *al-Balāgh,* a journal that he edited, in November 1915, Azad announced the plan to write a translation of the Qur'ān (*Tarjumān*) along with a detailed Qur'ān commentary, which he titled *al-Bayān fi maqāṣid al-Qur'ān,* and prolegomena to the commentary, *Muqaddima-e-tafsīr.*[85] However, the last two projects had never come to fruition. Perhaps it is so because the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* has already included elements of commentary and material originally planned for the prolegomena. Even in the case of the *Tarjumān,* Azad was only able to publish it in the early 1930s. We are told that

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[82] I.H. Azad Faruqi, *The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* p. 35. See also Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Towards Freedom* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1997), p. 66.
[83] See Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad*, pp. 9-10.
[84] Ibid., p. 197.
[85] See S.A. Kamali, "Abul Kalam Azad's Commentary on the Qur'ān," *The Muslim World* 49/1 (1959), p. 5. See also V.N. Datta, *Maulana Azad*, p. 183.

manuscripts he prepared earlier in his life were taken away by the authority as he was arrested several times for his political activities during the year 1916-1923. Azad was an enigmatic figure. He was first actively involved in the non-compromised Khilafat movement, but after his release in 1923 he began his formal co-operation with the Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi, and became the Congress president in 1940. He joined the interim government in 1947 as Minister of Education, which continued up until his death in 1958.[86] Due to this public career, it is understandable that he claims to have spent twenty seven years preparing his *tafsīr*. In the Preface to the first volume of the *Tarjumān,* he writes:

> The subject has engaged my mind seriously over a long period of 27 years. Every chapter of the Qur'ān, every part of it, and indeed every verse and every word of it has obliged me to traverse innumerable valleys and to encounter numerous obstacles. I may assert that I have looked into a considerable portion of the vast literature, both published and unpublished, that exists today on the subject.[87]

The first volume of the *Tarjumān* is devoted to elucidating the first chapter of the Qur'ān, sūra al-Fātiḥa, while the other two volumes cover sūras 2-23. (It is unfortunate that he could not complete his *tafsīr*.) Since Azad considers the sūra al-Fātiḥa as the essence of the whole Qur'ān, it is not surprising that he employs the commentary on this sūra to explain many ideas regarding God and religion. Ian Henderson Douglas describes Azad's endeavor as follows: "The desire to be open-hearted, broad-minded, and concerned with what all religions recognize as significant, which is expressed in the sūra al-Fātiḥa, is also found throughout the *Tarjumān.*"[88] Besides as political leader who wanted to unite the nation in harmony, Azad's inclusivist approach to other religions can be traced back to his commitment to the Sufi tradition as he himself claims to be a

[86] On Azad's political biography, see Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence: Abul Kalam Azad – A Fresh Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[87] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* trans. Dr. Syed Abdul Latif (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967), vol.1, p. xlii.
[88] Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography,* p. 215.

successor to Dahlawi, who were known for his conciliatory approach to various Sufi orders.[89] Azad's emphasis on the need to recognize the truth in all religious traditions becomes the major theme of his *tafsīr.*

The last two modern exegetes to examine are Shī'ī scholars, namely Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya of Lebanon and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī of Iran, whose *tafsīr*s are widely read not only in the Shī'ī circle but also among Sunnīs. Perhaps, the extensive use of both Shī'ī and Sunnī sources, including *al-Manār,* was intended to broaden their audience. This indicates that the trend of Islamic reform reached far beyond the theological divide. Mughniyya was a Lebanese prolific writer who wrote a well-known *tafsīr*, called *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif.* Within the modern Shī'ī political thought, he was known for offering a "liberal" interpretation of the Shī'ī form of clerical government.[90] Mughniyya was born in 1904 in Tir Dibba, a village near Tyre, southern of Lebanon. As his parent died before he reached the age of fifteen, Mughniyya lived through harsh times, an experience that influenced his political engagements later in his life.[91] He moved to Beirut, where he lived on his own for several years, selling books and other goods on the street, and then left Lebanon to pursue his religious studies in Najaf, the most famous Shī'ī seminary, known as *ḥawza 'ilmiyya,* at that time in Iraq. In 1936 he returned to Lebanon and

[89] Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll in their "Introduction" to Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography,* pp. 7-10.

[90] Mughniyya's rationalist approach to the question of Imamate (leadership) has been discussed by Karl-Heinrich Göbel, "Moderne Schiitische Politik und Staatstsidee," and an excerpt translated into English by Hamid Dabashi under the title "Imamate," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al (eds.) *Expectation of the Millennium: Shī'īsm in History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 3-6. In page 4, Mughniyya responds to the question whether the Imamate is still relevant in the modern context by postulating the following hypothesis: "There is no Imam other than truth (*lā-imām siwā al-ḥaqq*). However, since the truth can be fathomed only through the agency of reason, Mughniyya explains that the statement *there is no Imam other than through reason* is accordingly a rule of truth and right." For a critical review of this article and the book, see Michael Sells, "Bookreview of *Expectation of the Millennium*," *The Journal of Religion* 71/2 (1991): pp. 298-299.

[91] See Chibli Mallat, *Shī'ī Thought from the South of Lebanon* (Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies, 1988), p. 16; Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shī'īsm, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 216.

began contributing regularly to *al-'Irfān,* a journal published since 1909 which became the point of convergence of Arabic speaking Shī'ī writers throughout the century.[92] Many of his writings during this time exposed the politically marginalized Shī'a in South Lebanon. In his first published book, *al-Wad' al-ḥāḍir fi Jabal 'Āmil: Bidāya al-qahr wa al-ḥirmān* (1947), Mughniyya voices his disappointment with the underdevelopment of South Lebanon, denounces its corrupt leaders and criticizes the clerical classes, whom he lambastes for pious hypocrisy. As Chibli Mallat writes, "the tone of Mughniyya's writings and discourse rang more of revolt than pity," that is, "of revolt against the State and the deputies who (mis)represent it."[93]

In 1948 Mughniyya was appointed as a judge at the Ja'fari *sharī'a* court in Beirut and served as court president from 1951 until 1956.[94] Nonetheless, he did not stop criticizing the political orthodoxy of the day. Fueled by the high spirit of reform, he even declared an open disagreement with Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (government of the jurist).[95] His disagreement with Khomeini was expressed in a number of books, including *al-Shī'a wa al-ḥākimūn* (1966), *Imāma 'Alī bayn al-Qur'ān wa al-'aql* (1970), and *al-Khumaynī wa al-dawla al-Islāmiyya* (1979). In his latter book, Mughniyya argues that sovereignty during the infallible Imam's absence belongs to the people in general and not to the jurists only.[96] For him, government officials and representatives must be elected by people and the state should not

[92] For a discussion of the journal *al-'Irfān* and its place in the intellectual life of the Arab East during the first half of the twentieth century, see Tarif Khalidi, "Shaykh Ahmad 'Arif al-Zaydan and *al-'Irfān,*" in Marwan R. Buheiry (ed.) *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890-1939* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1981), pp. 110-124.
[93] Chibli Mallat, *Shī'ī Thought from the South of Lebanon*, p. 19.
[94] Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*, p. 219.
[95] For a detailed discussion on Mughniyya's idea of reform, see Hadi Fadlullah, *Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya: Fikr wa-Iṣlāḥ* (Beirut: Dār al-hādī, 1993).
[96] Muḥammad Jawad Mughniyya, *al-Khumaynī wa al-dawla al-Islāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-'ilm lil-malāyīn, 1979), p. 65. For further discussion on this, see T.M. Aziz, "Popular Sovereignty in Contemporary Shī'ī Thought," *The Muslim World* 86/3-4 (1996): pp. 273-293; Shahrough Akhavi, "Contesting Discourses in Shī'ī Law on the Doctrine of the *Wilayat al-Faqih*," *Iranian Studies* 29/3-4 (1996): pp. 229-268.

interfere in religious matters, but be confined to the realm of administration and social affairs.[97] The stance Mughniyya took against the political orthodoxy of the day was not without personal cost. He lost his job as president of the *Sharīʻa* court in Beirut in 1956, and he was overlooked as successor to the *muftī* of Tyre in favor of the much younger Mūsā al-Sadr.[98]

Mughniyya's criticism of Khomeini shows not only his unorthodox reputation, but also his openness to the challenge of modernity. Living in multi-cultural and multi-confessional Lebanon, Mughniyya was faced with a central question: Will the state be one for all of its citizens or will it end up granting special rights and privileges to the religious elite? In his book, *Falsafa al-akhlāq fi al-Islām*, Mughniyya argues that all heavenly religions (*adyān samāwiyya*) must be protected because their essence is one emanating from the same source, in spite of their different appearances as they were revealed for different generations with different levels of civility.[99] When talking about Mughniyya's *tafsīr*, Mahmoud Ayoub writes "the late Lebanese scholar Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya produced his commentary in a multireligious society in which religious leaders are expected to respect the faiths of their fellow citizens and promote interreligious harmony."[100] In the Introduction to his *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* Mughniyya tells us about his motivation to write his *tafsīr*: namely that the new generation (*al-jīl al-jadīd*) has for a while neglected not only Islamic principles (*al-qiyam al-Islāmiyya*) but also humanist principles (*al-qiyam al-insāniyya*), such as solidarity and equality, peace and harmony, and sincerity and justice.[101] Therefore, he strives to emphasize "that the relations among mankind should be based

[97] Ibid., p. 65-66.
[98] Roger Shanahan, *The Shiʻa of Lebanon: Clans, Parties and Clerics* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), p. 152.
[99] Mughniyya, *Falsafa al-akhlāq fi al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-ʻilm lil-malāyīn, 1984), p. 219.
[100] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qur'ān and Contemporary Exegetical Tradition," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8/2 (1997), p. 153.
[101] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kāshif* (Beirut: Dār al-ʻilm lil-malāyīn, 1968), vol. 1, p. 7.

on the principle of protecting the honor (*karāma*) of every individual irrespective of gender, skin color, wealth, and religion."[102] He further says, "The reader will find in this *tafsīr* the evidence which relates religion with the reality of life in its various manifestations, for it will pay more attention to the human dimension than to the linguistic side."[103] Unfortunately, scholars have been much interested in his political writings and they neglected this important *tafsīr* in spite of the fact that it represents his mature works.

Unlike Mughniyya, Ṭabaṭabā'ī's *tafsīr* has been the subject of many studies in Western scholarship, including Ph.D. dissertations. Scholars offer different accounts of when he was born, ranging from 1901 to 1904.[104] Probably he was born in 1903 to a family of 'ulama in a village near Tabriz, northwest of Iran.[105] He received his earliest education in the field of religious and Arabic studies in his native city, and at about the age of twenty he set out for Najaf, Iraq. He spent eight years there mastering *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* to an extent that he was certified as a *mujtahid* by Mirza Husayn Nā'inī, one of the highest legal authorities of the time.[106] Yet, Ṭabaṭabā'ī was more interested in philosophy, which, together with *tafsīr,* came to preoccupy him for most of his career.

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[102] Ibid., p. 12.
[103] Ibid., p. 9.
[104] For instance, Aboulfazl Sajedi Bidgoli says that "Ṭabaṭabā'ī was born in 1901 to a religious family in Tabriz." See Bidgoli, *Revelation and Reason in the Thought of Ṭabaṭabā'ī* (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 1995), p.11; Yousef Daneshvar Nilu says he was born in 1902. See Nilu, *Revelation and Religion: A Comparative Study if Karl Barth and Muḥammad Hussein Ṭabaṭabā'ī* (PhD Dissertation, University of St. Micahel's College, 2009), p. 148. Louis Abraham Medoff writes that he was born in 1904. See Medoff, *Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: An Analysis of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī's al-Mīzān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007), p. 1.
[105] This date of birth is supported, for instance, by Seyed Hosein Nasr "Preface" to Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *Shī'īte Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1975), p. 22; Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christian*; p. 86; Muḥammad Ja'far Elmi, *An Objective Approach to Revelation: S.M.H. Ṭabaṭabā'ī's Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān* (PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2002), p. 11.
[106] See Medoff, *Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'ānic Hermeneutics,* pp. 2-3.

In 1934 Ṭabaṭabā'ī returned to Tabriz, where he lived for ten years, working mostly on his farm to meet the necessities of life. In spite of facing an acute financial problem, "he was able nonetheless to complete during this involuntary residence in Tabriz no fewer than nine treatises."[107] He then moved to the city of Qum, where he taught Islamic philosophy and *tafsīr* for three decades and became one of the masters in these fields. After ten years of teaching at this center of religious studies, he began writing his monumental work, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* which took him eighteen years to finish. *Al-Mīzān,* which was written in Arabic language, consists of 20 volumes and was translated completely to Persian and up to volume six to English.[108] He explained his motive for writing this widely read *tafsīr* as follows:

> When I came to Qum, I looked at the teaching program and compared it with the needs of Islamic society. I found that the program suffered from certain weakness and I felt it is my duty to rectify them. The most important weakness was in the area of Qur'ānic exegesis and philosophical sciences. Therefore, I started to teach *tafsīr* and philosophy. At that time, *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān was not considered a subject in need of research. In fact it was not suitable for those who were able to teach in *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) to teach *tafsīr* and it was considered as a weak point for the lecturers in that field. However I knew I could not use this as an excuse in front of God and I continued teaching and lecturing about *tafsīr* until I complete the writing of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān.*[109]

Al-Mīzān has been well received by Muslim scholars, both Shī'īs and Sunnīs. Among Shī'ī scholars, this *tafsīr* has been regarded as one of the greatest commentaries of the Qur'ān. Sunnī scholars also praised this *tafsīr* although they criticized its Shī'ī tendency and inclination with regard to those verses which are subject to dispute between them, especially on the question of

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[107] Hamid Algar, "'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī: Philosopher, Exegete, and Gnostic," *Journal of Religious Studies* 17/3 (2006), p. 332.
[108] The title of the English translation is *Al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'ān,* trans. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, 12 volumes (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Service, 1983). However, I rely on the original edition because, among other reasons, I found that Rizvi presents in many cases a summary of the original text, not the full text.
[109] Cited by Elmi, *On Objective Approach to Revelation*, p. 14; Medoff, *Ijtihad and Renewal in Qur'ānic Hermeneutics,* pp. 8-9; Algar, "'Allama Sayid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī," pp. 333-334.

succession after the death of the Prophet.[110] What makes this *tafsīr* an important contribution to the whole process of renewal of the overall stagnant exegetical tradition is Ṭabaṭabā'ī's dynamic engagement with both medieval texts and modern contexts. After elucidating verses under a section called "*bayān*" (explanation), Ṭabaṭabā'ī discusses in a section called "*baḥth riwā'ī*" (discussion of transmitted materials) relevant *ḥadīth*s from both Shī'ī and Sunnī sources and often times provides supplementary discussion on pertinent philosophical, historical and sociological issues. In a section called "*baḥth ijtimā'ī*" (discussion of social issues), he deals with numerous topics of contemporary concern.

His interest in mystical and gnostic teachings led him to master not only Ibn 'Arabi's works, but also non-Islamic texts such as the Tao-Te-Ching, the Upanishads and the Gospel of St. John, conceived of as an exercise in "comparative gnosis."[111] His interest in such diverse religious traditions must have been inspired by an ecumenical motive. Hamid Algar is right when saying that Ṭabaṭabā'ī's interest in comparative mysticism has been "part of a broad agenda for the critical study of a wide variety of religious and philosophical traditions."[112] Perhaps, his prolonged acquaintance with one of the most celebrated French Orientalists on Islam, Henry Corbin (d.1978), helped him in his endeavor to study mysticism in different religious traditions. This background in comparative religion is quite prominent in Ṭabaṭabā'ī's *tafsīr*, as will be evident in those sections of it analyzed in this study.

From the above discussion we learn that to each of the six Muslim scholars discussed in this study *tafsīr* has been their central contribution. We also learn that Islamic reform is more diverse than is sometimes supposed. Some reformers are very much engaged with their local

[110] Elmi, *An Objective Approach to Revelation,* p. 14.
[111] Nasr, Preface to *Shī'īte Islam,* p. 24; McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* p. 87.
[112] Algar, "'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī," p. 344.

contexts, and others absorb the spirit of modern time into their reformist agenda. The diversity of their concerns and emphasis also reflects in their exegetical works, including their approaches to the Qur'ān's polemical texts. In this dissertation we explore the kind of creative and innovative thinking that these modern Muslim reformers offer in their exegetical enterprise. In what follows, we shall discuss the extent to which modern *tafsīr*s differ from classical ones.

Reformist Muslim Approach to Medieval Qur'ān Commentaries

Unlike earlier *mufassirūn*, Muslim reformers do not undertake verse-by-verse explication, but rather they divide their interpretation into sub-topics, and use them as a support and foundation for their own ideas. At the beginning of each sūra these modern exegetes give a brief overview, running from a paragraph to a few pages, of what they identify as its overarching objective. Next they start their interpretation by taking a group of related verses and commenting on the group overall main theme, followed by verse-by-verse commentary. From this perspective, they adopt a somewhat thematic approach to each sūra of the Qur'ān.

In terms of content, most modern *tafsīr*s do not rely heavily on the traditional materials such as *ḥadīth*s and *āthār* (statements attributed to the earliest generation of Muslims) which were repeated frequently in medieval *tafsīr*. The fact that these Muslim reformers have explicitly expressed their critical stance towards the early *tafsīr*s challenges the commonly held assumption that modern Qur'ān commentaries do not depart significantly from that of medieval *tafsīr*. Riḍā, for instance, criticizes medieval Qur'ān commentators and charges their commentaries as being a "veil" (*hijāb*) hindering the true teachings of the Qur'ān. These commentaries, he argues, instead of helping the people to understand the message of the Qur'ān, have become the thickest cover to hide the real message of the Qur'ān. In the Preface to *Tafsīr al-Manār,* Riḍā says:

> It was unfortunate for the Muslims that most of the commentaries of the Qur'ān deviated from its loft objectives. These commentaries lead people astray from the Qur'ān through their discussion of syntax and principles of grammar, or through rhetorics, or through their involvement in scholastic arguments, deductions of the experts in the principles of law, derivations of the jurists, interpretations of the mystics and even sectarian conflicts and jealousies, or through their excessive indulgence in narration of stories and absurd traditions borrowed from Jewish sources. To all this Rāzī added another factor and that was his introducing [in his commentary] information regarding new disciplines like mathematics, physics, Greek astronomy, etc., as in vogue in his times. Some of the modernists have also followed him by bringing in similar material pertaining to different disciplines of their times. So in what Rāzī calls the commentary of a verse [of the Qur'ān], he speaks of astronomy, botany or zoology while explaining words like *samā'* (sky) or *arḍ* (earth), which, in fact, distracts the minds of the readers from the real message of the Qur'ān for which it was revealed.[113]

Riḍā's sharp criticism of Rāzī is remarkable, given the popularity that the latter's *tafsīr* enjoyed among the Muslim community. What seems objectionable to Riḍā is that earlier Qur'ān commentators spend great deal with issues not directly related to the divine message: "Our purpose with all this is to show that most of what has come down to us as the traditional commentaries (*tafsīr al-ma'thūr*) is a veil over the Qur'ān. It turns its readers away from the high goals to purify the souls and enlighten the minds."[114] Riḍā claims that commentators relying heavily on the traditional *tafsīr* have become an impediment in the way of understanding the Qur'ān. Therefore, "there is an urgent need for a *tafsīr* that sets its primary goal for the guidance of the Qur'ān in a way that is in consonance with the meaning it was first revealed."[115]

Riḍā provides another reason for the need of a new direction in the field of *tafsīr*, saying that "most of what has been written by the earlier *mufassirūn* was based on conceptions and terminologies (*isṭilāḥāt*) which emerged after the first three centuries [of Islam]."[116] He, therefore, urges the researcher (*mudaqqiq*) to explain the Qur'ān according to the meaning that

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[113] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 7.
[114] Ibid., p. 10.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., p. 21.

was known at the time of its revelation. This kind of dissatisfaction with earlier Qur'ān commentaries is also evident in Azad's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān.* In fact, much of what Azad says about the early *tafsīr* echoes Riḍā, which demonstrates the close affinity of him with Riḍā's views. Criticizing earlier Qur'ān commentaries, he says: "When we look back into the history of the commentators of the Qur'ān from the earliest centuries of Islam right up to the close of the last century, we find that the standard of approach to the meaning of the Qur'ān had steadily deteriorated."[117] He further argues that "if we are to see the Qur'ān in its true light, it will be necessary for us to lift all those veils which have, from age to age, been laid thereon under the stress of influences alien to the spirit of the Qur'ān, and then search for the reality about it in its own pages."[118]

He also criticizes medieval commentators such as Rāzī in a similar manner to what Riḍā has said earlier:

> [T]he urge to cloak the Qur'ān in new garbs took its rise reaching its climax during the heyday of philosophic speculation among Muslims. That was the time when Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote his commentary to invest the Qur'ānic word with an absolutely novel import. Had Rāzī chosen to represent what exactly the Qur'ān stood for, at least two-thirds of what he wrote would have been left unwritten.[119]

Explaining what he feels to have been the factors contributing to this state of affairs, he writes "It is a matter for regret that those who came after the first generation, chiefly inspired by external influences, began to invent for themselves new and newer forms of approach to the Qur'ān and caused the original interpretation of it to fall into disuse."[120] Like Riḍā, he contends that commentators' interest in the traditional commentary (*tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*) "created further

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[117] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol. 1, p. xxxi.
[118] Ibid. pp. xxxi-xxxii.
[119] Ibid., p. xxxiii.
[120] Ibid., p. xxxiv.

difficulties in the understanding of the Qur'ānic word."[121] He sometimes refers to the *tafsīr* tradition as the "wall" between the Qur'ān and the Muslims. "Read the marginal notes by Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn," he writes, "you will see how much energy was wasted by them to give mere coatings to the walls already raised by others."[122] He also points to a practice, even habit, of commentators to lean heavily on the work of their predecessors, thereby frequently perpetuating inaccuracies. In his observation:

> The prevailing ineptitude of scholars in the succeeding periods of Muslim history let every form idiosyncrasy prosper; so much so, that only those commentaries came into fashion and were read with zest which bore no trace whatever of the touch given to the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the earliest band of commentators.[123]

Azad's own commentary is an attempt to return to the original meaning of the Qur'ān by presenting that which is universal in its teaching. In the words of J.M.S. Baljon, "It was for the purpose of exhibiting the brilliancy of the one universal truth mankind is so badly in need of, that Azad wrote his commentary *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (1930), inasmuch as the Koran is its document."[124]

Hamka's approach to the medieval *tafsīr* is much softer than that of Riḍā and Azad, although with the same spirit of presenting the Qur'ān in a way more accessible to the general readers. When talking about his method of interpretation, Hamka tells us that he tries to combine both rational (*dirāya*) and traditional (*riwāya*) approaches. He reminds the readers about the conflicting methods adopted by the early *mufassirūn*, which resulted in some confusion among later Muslims. "In many cases, the Qur'ān which is so arresting in its breadth as a source of human guidance," he writes, "has been narrowed by the *mufassir* himself to support his own

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[121] Ibid., p. xxxv.
[122] Ibid., p. xxxviii.
[123] Ibid., p. xxxviii.
[124] J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961), p. 10.

view."[125] He refers to Zamakhsharī and Rāzī who, in his view, interpret the Qur'ān to uphold their own theological views. As for his position, Hamka claims to "follow the way of *salaf* (*madhhab salaf*), which is the way of the Prophet, his companions, and other 'ulama who follow in his footsteps."[126] Hamka spends a great deal of time discussing some limitations of the early Qur'ān commentaries and, therefore, new insights are needed.

In a similar vein, Mughniyya refers to a *mufassir* who does not offer a new insight as "someone who does not possess a conscious reason (*'aqlan wā'iyan*), but merely a reading reason (*'aqlan qāri'an*) with the ability to picture in it what he reads of the work of others like the picture that appears on the mirror."[127] Mughniyya argues that the meanings of the Qur'ān are so deep to the farthest limits, that no one could be able to reach the very end of those limits, however excellent might be his knowledge and understanding. For Mughniyya, the *mufassir* must have new insights, otherwise he is just following blindly. "If the earlier *mufassir* stopped at one point and the next *mufassir* came and followed in his footstep and did not go beyond it even by one step," Mughniyya argues further, "he is exactly like the blind leaning on a crutch. Once he lost it he would be stuck in his place."[128]

While explaining his approach to the Qur'ān, Mughniyya claims that his approach differs from that of earlier *mufassirūn* who put much emphasis on linguistic aspects and detailed expositions of the Qur'ānic sentences and structures. For his part, he claims that his *tafsīr* rather emphasizes different aspects "which would convince the reader that religion in its principles and details (*uṣūl wa furū'*) and in its entire teachings aims at the best interest of humanity, its honor

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[125] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* vol. 1, p. 35.
[126] Ibid., p. 36.
[127] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 1, p. 10.
[128] Ibid.

and happiness. Whoever deviated from this noble purpose he has deviated from the truth of religion and the straight path of life."[129] He asserts that there is no reason why the later *mufassirūn* should repeat uncritically what has been said by their predecessors since they lived in different times and responded to different problems. The nature of *tafsīr,* for Mughniyya, is like an art emerging from local contexts (*ẓurūf maḥalliyya*) and it therefore should take into consideration the demands of the present time and place.

As for the possible rereading and reinterpretation of the Qur'ān, Mughniyya refers to the fame Sufi master Ibn 'Arabī who said in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiya*: "Anyone who reads a verse of the Qur'ān would find a [new] meaning in each reading which he has not found in his earlier reading, in spite of the fact that he reads the same text but the context and condition do change. Since the time of the first reading is different from that of the second reading, there should be some kind of renewal in meaning."[130] Commenting on this, Mughniyya argues that Ibn 'Arabī strongly believes something gets renewed (*yatajaddad*) and multiplied (*yata'addad*) with the changing time. He also refers to the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (d.1970) who is reported to have said: "the earlier philosophers developed from their own thoughts theories which were later proved correct by scientific knowledge. These theories were in fact no more than personal opinions in their time."[131] All this leads Mughniyya to say that "I do not consider the earlier *mufassirūn*'s view as a conclusive argument or independent proof, but merely as a support of particular view in case the text opens to more than one meaning."[132] Mughniyya also expresses his skepticism about the reliability of reports concerning the occasions of revelation

[129] Ibid., p. 13.
[130] Ibid., p. 14.
[131] Ibid. I was not able to trace the source of this quotation from Russell's own works.
[132] Ibid., p. 16. In his detail study of Mughniyya's *tafsīr*, Jawād 'Alī Kassār concludes that, for Mughniyya, the *mufassir* should never claim to have a monopoly in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation. See Jawād Alī Kassār, *Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya: Ḥayātuhū wa-manhajuhū fi al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-ṣadīqayn, 2000), p. 193.

(*asbāb al-nuzūl*). The reason for his rare use of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* is "because the 'ulama have not been able to scrutinize their transmission and distinguish the sound from the weak one."[133]

The Iranian scholar Ṭabaṭabā'ī uses transmitted materials, including *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports, extensively. However, he too expresses skeptical attitude to the reliability of those reports. As will be seen throughout this dissertation, he often refers to the narratives of *asbāb al-nuzūl* as "merely giving theoretical reasons and are not based on factual events."[134] Echoing *al-Manār* and *Tarjumān*, Ṭabaṭabā'ī regrets that earlier commentators were too preoccupied with everything other than *tafsīr.* "After having disintegrated deeply into various schools," Ṭabaṭabā'ī argues, "Muslim exegetes differed in their methods to an extent that nothing unified them except the word 'There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the messenger of God'."[135] While criticizing the tendency of the earlier *mufassirūn* to intermingle *tafsīr* with theological, philosophical and *ṣūfī* inclinations, he also calls into question the style of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* or *tafsīr bi al-riwāya* which has been the most common since the medieval period. He finds some defects of this type of *tafsīr*: "They (the people of tradition, *ahl al-ḥadīth*) were mistaken. God

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[133] Ibid., p. 14.

[134] Among Western scholars, both the historicity and function of the so-called "*asbāb al-nuzūl*" have been subjected to critical scrutiny. A number of scholars consider the *asbāb al-nuzūl* merely as the product of an exegetic elaboration on the Qur'ānic text. Andrew Rippin argues: "Narrative expansion of the Qur'ānic verse is a more frequent feature in the *asbāb*, ranging from the most simple setting of the scene to a full elaboration, spinning an entire narrative structure around a Qur'ānic verse." See Rippin, "The Function of *Asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988): p. 4. Elsewhere Rippin writes that stories found in the biography of the Prophet (*sīra*) were designed to provide *asbāb al-nuzūl* of the Qur'ān. See Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-nuzūl*: a Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): pp. 1-15. In line with this, Uri Rubin goes a step further arguing that "although the traditions known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* occur in the collections of *tafsīr* – for example, al-Ṭabarī's – the birthplace is in the *sīra*, where they do not yet function as *asbāb*." See Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), p. 227. I assume that Rubin has in mind stories used by Ibn Isḥāq. However, if we examine Muqātil's *tafsīr*, the question that the traditions known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* were born in the *sīra* literature seems to be problematic. As is well known, Muqātil used *asbāb al-nuzūl* extensively in his *tafsīr*. It is more plausible to argue that those traditions were already in the air during the first two centuries of Islam that authors might incorporated them into their works, either *sīra or tafsīr*.

[135] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-a'lām lil-maṭbū'at, 1980), vol. 1, p. 5.

has not said in His book that rational proof had no validity. How could He say so when the authenticity of the book itself depends on rational proof! He has also never said that the views of the companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and the followers (*tābiʿūn*) had any value as religious proof."[136] Ṭabaṭabā'ī goes even further by denouncing the more recent development in the field of *tafsīr* which employs scientific knowledge. For him, those who follow this new development "improve nothing on what had been ruined by the earlier generations (*salaf*)."[137]

Summarizing his objection to the various styles of *tafsīr*, whether from the medieval or modern exegetes, Ṭabaṭabā'ī asserts that they all share a common major defect in their imposition of preconceived views onto the Qur'ān. His main criticism of the earlier *mufassirūn* is that they have gone too far by bringing into the Qur'ān their personal views to such an extent that makes it difficult to distinguish "between the presuppositions, assumption and subjectivity of the interpreter, on the one hand, and the actual, objective meaning of the verses such as this has been intended by the Divine author of the text."[138] Of course, we can ask: Is it really possible to interpret a given verse of the Qur'ān without in any way using presupposition and assumption? The way Ṭabaṭabā'ī interprets the Qur'ān in his *al-Mīzān* is more complex than his method seems to lead to, since he provides not only an explanation (*bayān*) of a given verse, but also a rich discussion of various aspects such as historical, philosophical, and social aspects. What is relevant to the purpose of this Introduction is the way Ṭabaṭabā'ī refers to his method as "the

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[136] Ibid., pp. 5-6.
[137] Ibid., p. 8.
[138] Mohammad Jafar Elmi, *An Objective Approach to Revelation: S.M.H. Ṭabaṭabā'ī's Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān,* p. 245.

straight path and the right way which was used by the true teachers of the Qur'ān and its guidance."[139]

Among these six modern Muslim reformers, Qāsimī is perhaps the most frequent in referring to classical sources. He moves from one author to another, and cites them without fanaticism. His sources range from traditionalist to rationalist spectrums, including Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr on the one hand, and Zamakhsharī and Rāzī on the other hand. He also emphasizes the role of *ijtihād* in his *tafsīr*. While most *mufassirūn*, medieval and modern, disparage the free play of personal opinion (*ra'y*) in *tafsīr,* known as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, Qāsimī asserts that the use of reason in the field of *tafsīr* is unavoidable. Qāsimī does not mention the tradition most *mufassirūn* used to cite to argue against the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, namely: "Whoever interprets the Qur'ān according to his personal opinion, will surely occupy his seat in the Fire."[140] Instead, he offers three reasons why *al-ra'y* is necessary in the exegetical enterprise. First, it is impossible to understand the meaning of the Qur'ānic passages without the *ra'y*, especially when dealing with the need to derive a legal ruling. Second, the Prophet was not obliged to explain everything in detail. Rather, he left most of what can be known through *ijtihād*. Third, the companions of the Prophet themselves had attempted to interpret the Qur'ān based on their own understandings. Therefore, Qāsimī concludes, "the general restriction and prohibition of the use of *ra'y* is unacceptable."[141] With this critical attitude to the earlier *tafsīr* in mind, we are now in position to examine reformist Muslim approaches to the polemics of the Qur'ān against other religions.

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[139] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* vol. 1, p. 12.

[140] In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, Ṭabarī has collected variants on this Prophetic denunciation of *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān,* (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 77-79; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓim*, vol. 1, p. 5. Ignaz Goldziger also mentions a number of *ḥadīth*s put into circulation to resist this approach, including one in which the use of personal opinion is declared to be unbelief (*man fassara al-Qur'ān bi al-ra'y fa-qad kafara*). Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1920), pp. 61-62.

[141] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Dār ihyā' al-kutub al-'arabiyya, 1957), vol. 1, p. 164.

However, before embarking on that project, we will first discuss the polemical context and nature of the Qur’ān.

Chapter One
TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'ĀN'S POLEMICAL TEXTS

In a modern society it is more or less axiomatic that other people's religious belief must be tolerated and respected. As Michael Cook puts it, "it would be considered ill-mannered and parochial to refer to the religious views of others as *false* and one's own as *true*; for those fully educated into the elite culture of Western society, the very notion of absolute truth in matters of religion sounds hopelessly out of date."[1] Perhaps, this "norm" of the modern world, which demands a tolerant attitude towards the religious belief of others, has led to some sort of reluctance among scholars to discuss the polemical texts in the Qur'ān. However, avoiding a scholarly discussion of the Qur'ān's polemical texts is not a solution either. As a matter of fact, the polemical elements of the Qur'ān have been effectively used or misused by radical Muslims as a scriptural justification for their violent actions against others. It is my contention that while these polemical texts reflect the ongoing conflict in the early formation of Muslim religious identity, they must be re-evaluated and re-interpreted in light of religious diversity in the modern context.

This chapter begins with discussion about why there exist polemical discourses in the Qur'ān by looking at the polemical environment within which the Prophet Muḥammad delivered his prophetic mission. I argue that by understanding the polemics of the Qur'ān within the larger context of Muḥammad's encounters with the established religions during his prophetic mission, the reader will be able to understand how those polemical claims were made. Scholars have for a

[1] Michael Cook, *The Koran: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 33.

while been perplexed by conflicting accounts of the Qur'ānic criticism of other religious beliefs and heretical elements in its critique such as in the case of Christian doctrine of the Trinity or the Jewish claim of 'Uzayr as the son of God. I discuss this issue in great detail and offer some possible explanations. The final section of this chapter deals with the question of supersession of all other religions by the advent of Islam, a question that has preoccupied the scholars' attention from the early stage of Muslim intellectual history but acquired a new insight into the modern context.

The Qur'ān and Its Polemical Context

Although it is generally accepted that the existence of various types of polemical texts in the Qur'ān reflects Muḥammad's changing experience throughout his prophetic mission both in Mecca and Medina, one should not assume that the Qur'ān is a record of the historical events in which Muḥammad was involved in both Mecca and Medina. However, it might have a historical value.[2] Muslims from fairly early on tried to connect individual revelations with events in Muḥammad's life to establish the contexts of revelations, but they vehemently refused to attribute the Qur'ān to the evolution of the Prophet's spiritual life and his religious and political problems and strategies. The early works on the Qur'ān such as *Geschichte des Qoran*s of Nöldeke, Schwally, and Pretzl[3] establish the link between the Qur'ān and the biography of

[2] This is in contrast to Patricia Crone who argues that "the Qur'ān does not offer much historical information, and what it does offer is formulated in a style so allusive that it is largely unintelligible on its own." See Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 203-204. However, recently she wrote an article reconstructing the religion of the Arab pagans based primarily on the Qur'ānic accounts. See Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010): pp. 151-200.

[3] Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qoran*s (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860). Written originally in Latin, submitted as a dissertation in 1856 and awarded the winning prize in a Parisian competition for a study of the "critical history of the text of the Qur'ān." The work was reedited and expanded by Friedrich Schwally, a student of Nöldeke, in three parts: *Über den Ursprung des Qorans* (Leipzig, 1909); *Die Sammlung des Qorans* (Leipzig, 1919); *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, with Otto Pretzl (Leipzig, 1938. Reprint Hildesheim and New

Muḥammad. For Nöldeke and others, both the history and meaning of the Qur'ān are to be understood in light of the biography of the Prophet.[4] In line with this position, Alford Welch argues that "the Qur'ān is a historical document that reflects the prophetic career of Muḥammad and responds constantly to the specific needs and problems of the emerging Muslim community."[5] Similarly, Angelika Neuwirth describes a pre-canonical Qur'ān as "accompanying and documenting the historical process of the emergence of the early Muslim community."[6]

Recently, some Western scholars have begun to challenge this "master narrative" about the link between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's biography. Influenced by John Wansbrough's works, these scholars, generally called "revisionists", call into question the common tendency of associating the Qur'ān exclusively with the biography of Muḥammad in an isolated Arabia. For, if we open the Qur'ān and on almost every page we find materials, from the "Garden of Eden" to the virginal birth of "Īsā ibn Maryam (Jesus the son of Mary)", that can accurately be described "biblical." The immediate and sensible conclusion is that some Jewish or Christian, or perhaps Jewish-Christian, influence was at work here.[7] But revisionist scholars differ on how such an influence shaped the Qur'ān. Some argue that the Qur'ān is the product of a sectarian milieu, i.e. a "polemical" confrontation with other sectarian entities but notably the Jews, which took place not in Arabia where there were relatively few Jews, but rather in Iraq where there were many Jews and active Rabbinic schools and where the Muslims were in a dominant position as rulers

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York: George Olms, 1981). For an Arabic translation, see Tiyyūdur Nūldaka, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān,* trans. G. Tamer (Beirut: Konrad-Adenauer, 2004).

[4] For a critical review of this approach, see Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'ānic Studies and Its Controversies," *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-25.

[5] Alford T. Welch, "Introduction: Qur'ānic Studies – Problems and Prospects," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion: Thematic issue* 47/4 (1979), p. 626.

[6] Angelika Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'ānic Creation Accounts (Part 1)," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 1 (2000), p. 26.

[7] For a review of the rich scholarly discussion on this issue, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-22.

of the ʻAbbāsid state.[8] Others assert that some elements of the Qur'ān can be traced back to early Christian writings in Syriac. A scholar under the pseudonym Christoph Luxenberg is perhaps the latest well-known champion of this theory.[9] Still others argue that the Qur'ān consists in part of Christian strophic hymns used as liturgy by the Christian of Mecca.[10] In a nutshell, as Fred Donner has rightly noted, Western studies of the Qur'ān seem today "to be in a state of disarray,"[11] in the sense that there is little in consensus among them.

My position is rather modest. I don't agree with the view that the Qur'ān is not in conversation with Biblical sources. Even if we grant that Muḥammad was in communication with God alone without any assistance from teachers or other people's books or stories, the same issue surfaces in a different form. How could his audience in early seventh-century Mecca have possibly understood the Qur'ān's highly allusive and often obscure references to Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the other Prophets without some familiarity with Biblical materials and related apocrypha? And where and how would they have acquired such knowledge? Reuven Firestone responds to these questions as follows: "The Qur'ān often makes reference to stories and legends of Biblical characters, for example, without actually providing the narrative in the text. It assumes in homiletical fashion that the listener is already familiar with the broad topics being

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8 John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

9 See Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäishe Lesart des Koran: ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), and its English version entitled *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: a Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: H. Schiler, 2007).

10 This view is generally attributed to the German scholar Günter Lüling. See Günter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islam Reinterpretations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003); originally published in German entitled, *Über den Ur-Qur'an: Ansätze z. Rekonstruktion vorislam. Christl. Strophenlieder Qur'an* (Erlangen, Lüling, 1974).

11 See Fred M. Donner, "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata," in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.) *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 29-50.

discussed."[12] However, at the same time, I don't think that the Prophet's life and milieu can be totally discarded from the way we approach the Qur'ānic texts. Looking at the Qur'ānic polemical passages from Muḥammad's encounters with other religious communities is useful in understanding why there exist various types of polemics in the Qur'ān. As will be discussed later, the Qur'ānic polemics against Jews, Christians, and Meccan pagans concentrate above all on the question of the acknowledgment of Muḥammad's prophetic mission and the genuineness of the Qur'ānic revelation. Like other scriptures, the Qur'ān also faithfully reflects the mood and attitude of the early community of believers in the earliest stages of their emergence into history. Given the hostile environment in which a new religion inevitably arises, it is not surprising to observe that the Qur'ān articulates its response sometimes in harsh language against elder religious communities that were trying to bring about the demise of a religion it represents. In that context, the Qur'ān uses polemical language to sharply define the identity of the community of believers in different phases of their development.

According to Muslim tradition, some parts of the Qur'ān were revealed at Mecca and others at Medina, formerly called Yathrib.[13] Although these two parts of the Qur'ān cannot be considered as entirely distinct, there is an important difference between them in certain respects. In Mecca, for instance, the Qur'ān directs its resentment and polemics mostly against the religion

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[12] See Reuven Firestone, *Journey in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 9. See also, Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān and the Presentation of Jesus in Ya'qubi's *Tarikh*," in John C. Reeves (ed.) *Bible and Qur'ān: Essay in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 134; Sidney H. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān," in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.) *The Qur'ān in Its Hstorical Context*, p. 115.

[13] In addition to the traditional Muslim account, there are other approaches to the question of dating the different parts of the Qur'ān. Among them I should especially note, firstly, the approach which began with Gustav Weil and was taken up and developed by Theodor Nöldeke and his followers; and secondly, the approach associated with Richar Bell. These scholars might not share the religious perspective of the Muslim sources, but they nevertheless operate within the same basic framework, namely, that both the history and meaning of the Qur'ān are to be understood in light of the Prophet Muḥammad's biography. For overviews of the different chronology of the Qur'ān, see Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

of the pagan Arabs. The most common term for the pagan Arabs in the Qur'ān is *mushrikūm,* derived from the word *shirk*, which has the sense of "sharing, participating, associating." That term carries something of the notion of polytheism, since polytheists are assumed to associate divinity in things other than God. But it also comes to denote idolatry because it refers to the sin of associating with God, as worthy of worship, other beings or things – divine, human, superhuman. Those who associate other powers with God are called *mushrikūn*. It must be pointed out, however, that both polytheism and idolatry are frequently relative and subjective accusations, denied by those accused of them. Nobody is likely to refer to his own religion as a form of idolatry and polytheism. These are frequently words used in polemical way to attack opponents. Even in the Qur'ān, according to Gerald R. Hawting, the word *mushrikūn* is "often used as a term in polemic directed against people who would describe themselves as fully monotheistic."[14]

During the Meccan period, the main challenge facing Muḥammad was to preach to the polytheists of Mecca, and therefore his message was directed primarily to them by calling them to turn from idolatry to the worship of the one true God. The conflict of Muḥammad with the Meccan polytheistic environment is evident in numerous points in the Qur'ān: "So turn aside from the filth of idols and turn aside from lying speech, turning to God [alone], not ascribing partners to Him; for whoever ascribes partners to God, it is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had seized him or the wind had blown him to a distant place" (Q.22:30-31). The Qur'ān

[14] Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 67. As a polemical statement, according to Gerald R. Hawting, the word *mushrikūn* does not necessarily means "polytheists" or "idol worshipers" in the real sense of the word. Assuming that the text has to be read as polemic, it may be argued, makes it possible to read the Qur'ān, every time it levels a charge of idolatry or polytheism against it opponents, as not really meaning what it says. Hawting's arguments urge us to rethink critically of our assumption about the emergence of Islam. For him, as a religious system "Islam should be understood as the result of an intra-monotheist polemic, in a process similar to that of the emergence of the other main divisions of monotheism."

describes some of the accusations that were leveled against Muḥammad by the Meccan pagans as follows:

> So they were surprised that a warner has come to them from their midst. Those unbelievers say, "This is a lying conjuror! Has he made the deities into one God? This is indeed a strange thing!" The chiefs among them go around saying, "Go, and remain faithful to your gods. This is certainly something concocted. We have not heard such thing among people recently. It is only a fabrication" (Q.38:4-7).

In response to their rejection of his message, the Qur'ān emphasizes two lines of argument. First, there is strong emphasis on Muḥammad's mission being in agreement with the preaching of the previous Prophets and Messengers who were sent forth as a means of guidance from God to mankind, bringing with them God's scriptures. In the words of Jacques Waardenburg: "The Meccan opposition caused the new religion to develop and stress the stories of the Prophets and the continuity of the Prophetic message, the claim of divine revelation and absolute truth, the need for repentance with a view to the Judgment to come, and the fight for the unity of God as a defense of God's honor. It also forced Muḥammad to give the necessary historical, theological and social weight to the message he conveyed."[15] In a similar vein, scriptures of the past are mentioned in the Meccan passages. The Meccan sūra 87, for example, ends: "This is in the ancient books, the books of Abraham and Moses" (Q.87:18-19). This passage provides an argument that the message which Muḥammad has just recited is in line with what is contained in the scriptures of Abraham and Moses. Elsewhere the question is asked in a tone of surprise whether those who doubt Muḥammad's message are not aware of the contents of earlier scriptures, again implying agreement between them and what Muḥammad is reciting (Q.53:36-7; 20:133; 21:7; 16:53; 10:94). The point being made here is not only that the message brought by

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[15] Jacques Waardenburg, "Towards a Periodization of Earliest Islam according to Its relations with Other Religions," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 308.

Muḥammad stands in continuity with the scriptures revealed through earlier Messengers, but also those who reject Muḥammad's message would face the same punishment as that of those who rejected the previous Prophets.

This leads to the second line of polemical argument presented by the Qur'ān against the unbelievers, namely, warning of severe divine punishment. The question is: With what kind of punishment does the Qur'ān threaten the Meccan unbelievers? From various punishment-narratives in the Qur'ān we learn that the Qur'ān often uses the stories of the punishment of past generations as a warning for the Meccan pagans.[16] To mention but a few examples are:

> Surely We have sent unto you [people of Mecca] a messenger as a witness over you, even as We sent to Pharaoh a messenger, but Pharaoh rebelled against the messenger, so We seized him remorselessly (Q.73:15-16).
> Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with ʻĀd, Iram of the pillars, the like of which was never created in the land, and Thamūd who hollowed the rocks in the valley, and Pharoah, he of the tent-pegs, who all were insolent in the land and worked much corruption therein? Your Lord unloosed on them a scourge of punishment; surely your Lord is ever on the watch (Q.89:6-14).

The above passages and other similar passages concerning the experiences of the Prophets of ancient times seem to imply that, just as God punished past generations of unbelievers, so in the same way He will punish the unrepentant Meccan unbelievers.[17] However, scholars differ on how temporal punishment is related to eschatological punishment, because in some cases the

[16] For a detail discussion of the punishment-narratives in the Qur'ān, see David Marshall, *God, Muḥammad, and the Unbelievers: A Qur'ānic Study* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999).
[17] There are other passages which make it explicit that the punishment-narratives are to be understood in the sense outlined above. Perhaps the clearest example comes in a passage to be understood as addressed by God to Muḥammad: "But if they [the unbelievers] turn away, then say, 'I warn you of a thunderbolt like to the thunderbolt of ʻĀd and Thamūd'" (Q.41:13). According to Rudi Paret, this passage means that Muḥammad is told to be unambiguous: what had happened in the past to ʻĀd and Thamūd was a possibility in the present for the Meccans if they continued their unbelief. See Rudi Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972), p. 88.

Qur'ān distinguishes between the two, but in others they seem to blur.[18] It is perhaps helpful to keep in mind Michael Sells' insight concerning early Meccan sūras:

> Much of the effect of the early Meccan sūras is due to what is not said, to the way in which a promise or warning is given but not fixed into a temporally or spatially located heaven or hell. The result is an openness as to what warning or promise actually means – an openness that invites each hearer or reader to meditate upon that moment in which his or her life, in its perspective of acts of justice or injustice, generosity or meanness, is unfolded.[19]

Since Muḥammad had been preoccupied with the negative response of the Meccan pagans, it is hardly surprising that there is not much reference to Jews and Christians. While the term "*naṣārā*" is regularly used in the Qur'an in referring to Christians, Jews are sometimes called "*yahūd*", "*hūd*", "*al-ladhīna hādū*" (those who became Jews) or referred to as "*banū isrā'īl*" (children of Israel). Interestingly, both *naṣārā* and *yahūd* and/or *hūd* occur only in Medinan sūras, which reflects the absence of immediate concern of the Meccan sūras toward them.[20] There is no evidence that there were Jewish or Christian communities living in Mecca in the seventh century. The reason is most likely that they did not feel comfortable living in a center of polytheistic religious practice, though individuals would regularly go there in order to trade. As W. Montgomery Watt puts it, "There were Christians in Mecca, traders and slaves, but the

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[18] According Richard Bell, at first Muḥammad did not clearly distinguish the two modes of punishment. However, ultimately the two things are quite clearly distinguished and conjoined. "It becomes a frequent statement," Bell argues, "that the unbelievers will suffer calamity in this world, and painful punishment in the world to come." See Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment,* p. 107. Tor Andrea maintains that the concept of temporal punishment does not only have significance in and of itself, but also as a pointer to the eschatological punishment. He further argues, "Like Christian preachers, Mohammed regarded these earthly punishments as precursors and preliminary steps to the final great judgment." See Tor Andrea, *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith,* trans. Theophil Menzel, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 54.

[19] Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloude Press, 1999), p. 57.

[20] The word "*naṣārā*" occurs fourteen times in the Qur'an: in al-Baqara (seven times), al-Mā'ida (five times), al-Tawba (once) and al-Ḥajj (once). The word "*yahūd*" occurs eight times in the Qur'an: three times in al-Baqara, four in al-Mā'ida, and once in al-Tawba. The word "*hūd*" is mentioned three times in al-Baqara. In addition, *al-ladhīna hādū* is mentioned ten times (three times in al-Mā'ida, twice in al-Nisā', once each in al-Baqara, al-An'ām, al-Naḥl, al-Ḥajj and al-Jum'a).

influence of isolated individuals was probably not so important [as elsewhere in Arabia]."[21] In the absence of any organized Jewish or Christian communities to serve as a substantial subject of Muḥammad's attention, his preaching was naturally directed towards the polytheists of Mecca.

It is, therefore, by no means surparising that some of Meccan passages speak of Jews and Christians in positive terms, calling them "the People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*). As Richard Bell observes, "during the whole of the Mecca period of his activity Muḥammad's attitude to the People of the Book, which must be taken as including both Jews and Christians… was consistently friendly."[22] Even those who doubt the truth of Muḥammad's message are encouraged to consult a scripture revealed before him (Q.21:7; 16:43; 10:94). The Qur'ān says "Those to whom We have given the Book know very well that it (the Qur'ān) has been sent down from your Lord in truth" (Q.6:144), and they "recognize it (him) as they recognize their sons" (Q.6:20). Moreover, the Qur'ān says, "Those to whom We have given the Book before it (the Qur'ān) believe in it. And when it is recited to them they say, "We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord, we have been *muslim*s (submitted to God) even before it" (Q.28:52-53).

These passages clearly imply a confidence that the Jews and Christians of his own days will support Muḥammad by recognizing the truth of his claims. The Qur'ān even tells us that "those to whom We have given the Book rejoice at what has been revealed to you" (Q.13:36). Scholars offer different explanations as to why the Meccan revelations refer to Jews and Christians as those who support and confirm the truth of Muḥammad's message. S.D. Goitein, for instance, argues that Muḥammad did encounter some positive response from Jews and

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[21] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 27. For a contrasting view, see Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989), especially chapter eight and two appendices.
[22] Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*, p. 147.

Christians at Mecca. "There is little doubt," says Goitein, "that Muḥammad's beginnings were met with approval by at least some of his monotheistic acquaintances."[23] In line with Goitein, Fazlur Rahman argues that "From the Qur'ān, it is abundantly clear that there were, among the followers of Judaism and (whether orthodox or not) of Christianity, some who affirmed the truth of the Prophet's mission and, in fact, encouraged him to in the face of Meccan opposition."[24] However, Rahman admits that it would be hard to establish conclusively the presence of a significant number of Jews and Christians at Mecca because "history tells us next to nothing about them, nor do we know whether these are the same persons with whom the Prophet held discussions."[25] Elsewhere Rahman argues that the Meccan allusions to the People of the Book are based on theoretical assumptions about what Jews and Christians *should be like* and about how they can be *expected* to respond, rather than on concrete encounters with specific people, as at Medina.[26]

The real situation at Medina, however, was quite different. Relations with the large Jewish population of Medina are a dominant theme in the early Medinan period. There is also significant contact with Christians, although this seems largely to have taken place later in the Medinan period. Muḥammad's appeal to the Jews and the Christians of Medina is based on two claims: (1) that the Qur'ān is the confirmation of their scriptures, and (2) to accept Muḥammad as the Prophet whose coming is foretold in their scriptures. Based on that, Muḥammad went to

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[23] S.D. Goitein, "The Concept of Mankind in Islam," in W. Warren Wagar (ed.), *History and the Idea of Mankind* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), p. 81.
[24] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* p. 137.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Rahman writes, "This attitude (that his message was a continuation or revival of earlier Prophets) is, however, on a purely theoretical or ideal religious plane and has no reference to the *actual* doctrine and practice of the 'People of the Book' and the two mush be distinguished." Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 26. This view is also held by David Marshall in his fine article entitled "Christians in the Qur'ān," in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretation of Christianity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 9.

Medina with high expectation to be recognized by the Jews and Christians as a true Prophet, and the Qur'ān, as far as it was the revealed, accepted by them as divinely inspired equally with former scriptures. Perhaps Muḥammad was deeply disappointed by the fact that the Jews accepted neither his prophetic teaching nor his prophetic status. From the perspective of the Jews, Muḥammad did not represent an authentic Prophet, but rather a threat to them and, unsurprisingly, they opposed him. As F.E. Peters points out, the Jews were more active than Christians in opposing Muḥammad in Medina, "they began secretly to convene with his enemies in Mecca to overthrow him."[27] Perhaps, that is one of the reasons why the Qur'ān contains more criticism of Jews than that of Christians.

The Prophet's reaction was "not simply pique at this rejection, but the reaction of a man in danger."[28] The parts of the Qur'ān revealed at Medina show a notable hardening of attitudes towards contemporary Jews. From the early Medinan period onward, there had emerged a kind of "competition" among the People of the Book. The Qur'ān looks on Jews and Christians as adherents of rival rather than collegial faiths. This is reflected in a number of ways. For example, Abraham, a crucial figure from religious history, is claimed as one who prefigured the faith of Muḥammad and his followers, rather than that of Jews and Christians.[29] This is an idea which is not found in the Meccan revelations. During the Meccan period more prominence was given to Moses than to Abraham.[30] When Muḥammad came to Medina, he presumably became more acquainted with the significance of Abraham in early Christian polemics against Judaism.

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[27] F.E. Peters, *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 194.
[28] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1956), p. 204.
[29] The Qur'ānic claim for Abraham, however, can also be seen as a plea that Christians and Jews should not assume that they alone have the truth. Abraham was a monotheist, not just a Jew or a Christian, but both and more. I would like to thank Professor Donner for driving me to this point.
[30] Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina,* p. 204.

As a matter of fact, Abraham acquired a special status for Jews to the extent that there would be "no Judaism without Abraham."[31] The promises to Abraham recorded in Genesis provided the foundation for the identity of Israel as a people set apart. Reference to these promises recurs throughout the Hebrew scripture. In the early Jewish writings, Abraham is also regarded as the model of a monotheistic champion of the faith who is to legitimate the fight against the idolatry of the time. That is also the case with the early Christian writings. Much of the early Christian polemics against Jews indicate the contestation between these two communities concerning who were the true heirs of Abrahamic tradition. By the latter part of the first century C.E., as James Raymond Lord points out, "The Abrahamic tradition then became something of a focus of Jewish-Christian polemic."[32] Jeffrey S. Siker in his detailed study of the uses of Abraham in early Christian controversies suggests that "the use of Abraham in early Christian controversy with Judaism moved away from appealing to Abraham as the father of Jew and Gentile alike and moved increasingly toward the portrayal of a Christian Abraham who has abandoned and disinherited his children, the Jews."[33]

Given Abraham's pivotal role as quintessential monotheist, it is by no means surprising that Abraham figures deeply in Qur'ānic polemics against not only polytheism, but also the establishment monotheisms of the day. The Qur'ān claims: "Surely, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are those who follow him, and this Prophet and those who believe [in him]; and God is the guardian of all believers" (Q.3:68). In a number of passages the Qur'ān describes

[31] See Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Abraham: A Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims* (London: SCM Press, 1995), p. 7.
[32] James Raymond Lord, *Abraham: A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1968), p. 288.
[33] Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 27.

Abraham as an "archetypal model" of Islam, *ḥanīf* (monotheistic) religion.[34] When in another passage Abraham prays that his descendents receive the same blessings as him, God answers, "My covenant does not include wrongdoers" (Q.2:124). This is a critique of Jewish claims to chosenness based on their kinship with Abraham, a critique that can also be found in the New Testament.[35] The most striking example of Abraham's role in the polemics of all three expressions of monotheism, however, is in Qur'ān 3:65-67:

> O People of the Book! Why do you argue about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Have you no sense? Do you not argue about things of which you have knowledge? Why, then, argue about things of which you have no knowledge! God knows, but you know not! Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but was a *ḥanif muslim*.

According to the traditional Muslim account, the above passages were revealed as a response to the rejection of Jews of Medina to Muḥammad's call. Some of them asked him to specify his religion: "What is your religion, O Muḥammad? (*'alā ayy dīnin anta yā Muḥammad?*)" When he told them that he was following the religion of Abraham, they rejected him, arguing that Abraham himself was a Jew. They also showed Muḥammad what the Torah has said about Abraham. In that situation, according to Muslim sources, these verses were revealed to confirm the true nature of Abraham's religion, which was neither that of a Jew nor a Christian.[36] Of

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[34] The word *ḥanīf* occurs in the Qur'ān ten times in the singular and twice in the plural *ḥunafā'*. In eight of its occurrences (2:135, 67; 3:95; 4:125; 6:79, 161; 16:120, 123), it refers explicitly to Abraham. Of the eight verses that mention Abraham, five include the phrase "*milla Ibrāhīm*" which might be translated as "the religion of Abraham." For a discussion of the meaning of the word "ḥanīf" in the Qur'ān and early *tafsir*s, see Mun'im Sirry, "The Early Development of the Qur'ānic 'Ḥanīf'," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56-2 (September, 2011): pp. 349-370.

[35] In the Gospel 3:7-8, Luke refers explicitly to physical descent from Abraham. As Jeffrey S. Siker points out, Luke rejects the idea that mere physical descent from Abraham would give one a special claim on God's mercy. Only repentance and ethical behavior that demonstrates this repentance count before God. Physical descent from Abraham makes no difference at all, for "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (3:8). See Jefrrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, p. 108.

[36] Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabī,* (ed.) Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Cairo: Maṭba'a ḥijāzi, 1937), vol. 2, pp. 179-180. For an English translation, see A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of Ishaq's Sirah Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 260.

course, it is difficult to ascertain whether the debate between Muḥammad and Jews did really take place. What is certain is that the above passages reveal the conception that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but the founder of monotheism; and that salvation and redemption do not come through claim of descent but through righteousness.

In that way, the Qur'ān makes an end-run around Jewish and Christian claims in order to claim Abraham for Islam. This contested inheritance is summarized nicely by F.E. Peters as follows:

> It is the promise of a chosen people, now parsed broadly to mean eternal vindication and salvation, that is contested among those who claim to be the children of Abraham. Jews claim the covenant as their own by reason of both their linear descent from Abraham via his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, the latter also known as Israel, and their fidelity to its terms. Christians, for their part, contend that, as God had forewarned, the promise had been redrawn as a New Testament and they were its heirs through their faith in God's son, Jesus, the Messiah. Muslims, finally, claim the inheritance not so much by supersession, as Christians do, as by a return to the pristine form of monotheism, the original "religion of Abraham.[37]

Here we can see clearly that Abraham becomes a symbol of the natural competition between newly emerging religion and establishment religions. One should not fail to note that in sūra 2 (al-Baqara), the treatment of Abraham (Q.2:124-41) leads immediately into passages (Q.2:142-50) discussing the change of the *qibla* (the direction for prayer adopted by Muḥammad and his followers) from Jerusalem to Mecca. This development is generally regarded as the decisive moment in Muḥammad's "break with the Jews" and is therefore a concrete mark of the religious distinctiveness of Muḥammad's community.[38] Nevertheless, it does not mean that the boundaries

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[37] F.E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 21.

[38] The phrase "Muhammad's break with the Jews" is used by scholars to indicate Muhammad's effort to establish practices to distinguish his emerging community of believers from the Jews. According to Montgomery Watt, this "break with the Jews" was symbolized by the change of *qibla.* See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 113. Some scholars such as Reza Aslan disagree, saying that

of the community of the believers were already clearly defined at the time. As Fred M. Donner has argued, the crystallization of Islam as an exclusive, confessional self-identity might take place much later than is given by the Muslim tradition.[39]

On the evidence we can only conclude that something went wrong between the Prophet and the Jews of Medina.[40] Much has been written about controversies around Muḥammad's "break with the Jews," which was first suggested by the nineteenth-century Dutch scholar C. Snouck Hurgronje. According to Hurgronje, in the Meccan passages Abraham was not portrayed as the arch monotheist, but as one of many other Prophets. Even when the term *milla* (religion) is mentioned in connection with Abraham, it is not yet exclusively his "religion," but *milla Ibrāhīm wa Ishāq wa Ya'qūb* (Q.12:38).[41] Hurgronje then asks: Which motivation can have led Muḥammad to make the Jewish patriarch into the Prophet of the true religion? For Hurgronje, the reason for this development, as summarized by Willem A. Bijlefeld, is "the setting free of Islam from Judaism," the necessity "to emancipate Islam from Judaism," the desire to give Islam

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such changes "should not be interpreted as "a break with the Jews," but as the maturing of Islam into its own independent religion." See Reza Aslan, *No God but God: the Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 100.

[39] See Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); See also Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhāth* 50-51 (2002-2003): pp. 9-53.

[40] It is not clear what really caused this break with the Jews. Some scholars argue that "The immediate cause of the break with the Jews was an altercation that occurred in the Banū Qaynuqā' marketplace involving some sort of indecency to a Muslim woman." See Richard Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), p. 104. This view is also supported by Jacob Lassner and Michael Bonner in *Islam in the Middle Ages: the Origins and Shaping of Classical Islamic Civilization* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), pp. 62-63. Ibn Hishām recounts the incident as follows: "As for the affair of the Banū Qaynuqā', there was an Arab woman who brought some goods to sell them in the market of the Banū Qaynuqā' and then she sat down by a goldsmith. Some people tried to uncover her face but she refused. The goldsmith took the end of her skirt and tied it to her back so when she stood up, her special parts appeared, and they laughed at her. She screamed and one of the Muslims jumped on the goldsmith and killed him, who was a Jew. The Jews hardened on the Muslim and killed him. The family of that Muslim called upon other Muslims for help against the Jews. The Muslims were angry and the evil spread between the two parties." See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabī*, vol. 2, p. 561.

[41] C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Mekkaansche Feest* (Leiden: Brill, 1880). This doctoral dissertation was reprinted in the author's *Verzamelde Geschriften – Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1 (Bonn-Lepzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1923). An abridged translation is available in *Selected Works of C. Snouck Hurgronje*, ed. in English and in French by G.H. Bousquet and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1957).

"its independence" now that the Prophet is confronted in Medina with the persistent Jewish refusal to acknowledge him. The call for a return to the *milla Ibrāhīm,* according to Hurgronje, was directed to the Jews, urging them to abandon all later innovations, to turn away from their deviations, and to go back to this simple, unadulterated monotheism of Abraham.[42]

Hurgronje's theory of Muḥammad's "break with Jews" has been widely accepted in Western circles.[43] Some Muslim scholars, however, do not agree with this view. The Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, for example, argues that "the more frequent and explicit reference to Abraham occurs in the Medinan revelations because by then it had become clear that religion is not established on a natural principle, not dependent on a specific messenger."[44] Fazlur Rahman also rejects Hurgronje's thesis, arguing that "It is, then, in a solidly Meccan context with pagans as its addressees that the Qur'ān develops its image of Abraham as the super-Prophet and arch-monotheist; and not in Medina as a consequence of controversies with Jews, as Hurgronje and Schwally say."[45] Rahman seems to argue that the conception of the Qur'ān about the religion of Abraham was not an innovation of Muḥammad after his break with the Jews. Rather, the religion of Abraham for Muḥammad was the introduction of monotheism and the complete break with the Meccan pagan beliefs and myths. Elsewhere Rahman writes:

> When the opposition of the Meccans begins to harden, the Qur'ān begins to refer to earlier messengers of Prophets. In sūra 87:18-19, the revelations or 'scrolls' of Abraham and Moses are mentioned, while in sūra 91:11 the Arab Prophet Salih of the ancient Arab tribe of Thamud is spoken of. This is evidence of the 'compound' Prophetology that in all likelihood already existed in Arabia before Islam, integrating ancient Arab and Biblical figures. The Qur'ān, in its references to previous Prophets, seeks support from them for

[42] Willem A. Bijlefeld, "Controversies around the Qur'ānic Ibrahim Narrative and Its 'Orientalist' Interpretations," *The Muslim World* 72/2 (1982), p. 85.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Cited by Bijlefeld, ibid., p. 86.
[45] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān,* p. 143.

> its own mission, claiming implicitly that the message brought by Islam is essentially identical with the message of earlier Prophets.[46]

Without delving into further debates, the point to be made here is that the Qur'ān takes seriously the Jewish refusal to acknowledge Muḥammad's prophetic mission. The fact that the Qur'ān pays much attention to this problem shows the importance that Muḥammad attached to resolving it. It seems safe to say that the conflict with the Jews of Medina was so deep that even when the Qur'ān deals with Jesus the Medinan revelations are governed by polemics against Jews.[47] For example, whereas in sūra 2 the focus was on the disobedience of the children of Israel and their hostility towards God's messenger Jesus, in sūra 3 the narrative culminates in the account of Jews having killed Prophets sent before Muḥammad (especially frequent in sūra 3: 21, 112, 181, and 183). In sūra 4: 156-8, it is said:

> And for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny; and for their saying, 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise.

Most Muslim commentators understand this passage to mean that Jesus did not die on the cross; often they suggest that someone else (e.g. Judas) died in his place while God exalted Jesus alive to heaven.[48] Yet, a careful examination of the precise wording of the Qur'ān shows that this is not directed against Christian belief. These are certainly verses of polemics against the Jews of Medina, because what is denied is the Jewish contention that the crucifixion had been a victory

[46] Fazlur Rahman, "Islam's Attitude toward Judaism," *The Muslim World* 72/1 (1982) p. 5.
[47] Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'ān," pp.11-12.
[48] For a detail discussion of Muslim commentaries and various scholarly debates on this issue, see Gabriel Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72/2 (2009): pp. 237-258.

for them. The passages tell us about God's punishment of Jews for various faults and among other things "for their saying: 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son Mary, the Messenger of God'."

Of course, there are other passages criticizing Christian belief directly, which reflect Muḥammad's increased contact with Christians in the last years of the Medinan period. However, we should not think of the Qur'ānic criticisms of Judaism and Christianity in chronological terms, implying that the earlier Medinan passages reflect conflicts with the Jews, whereas the later passages exclusively focus on the Christians. As David Marshall has pointed out, there is a certain amount of overlap between them. Some verses critical of Christian belief may date from the same time as passages which attack the Jews of Medina.[49] Likewise, in the latest phase the depiction of Jesus can still serve the purpose of polemics against Jewish opponents. Nevertheless, from the later Medinan verses we learn that the Qur'ān portrays Jesus and Mary at the heart of a theological controversy, especially by blaming the Christians for their attitude toward the divinity of Jesus.

Up to this point, I hope it is clear that the way the Qur'ān addresses the Jews and Christians of Medina corresponds to the various stages of, and the formative experience of, the first community of believers. Whereas in the Meccan period Qur'ānic references to the People of the Book are rather "neutral" and even "positive," Medinan verses are marked by gradually a more polemical discourse, at a stage when Islam is organized as a distinct religion in competition with Judaism and Christianity. In other words, the Qur'ān uses a polemical language in order to legitimize Muḥammad's prophetic mission in the ongoing conflict between the believer community and the Jewish and Christian communities at Medina. I would argue that if these controversial issues are read in their Qur'ānic setting there can be little doubt that those

[49] Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'ān," p. 16.

polemical passages serve to authenticate the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and to emphasize his status as a legitimate Prophet in the midst of the Jewish and Christian rejection. The Qur'ānic polemics, therefore, must be understood as the result of a complex process of religious formation.

The Ambiguity of Qur'ānic Criticisms

In so far as one can trace within the Qur'ān the progressive consolidation of Islamic religious identity, it is inextricably linked with the response of other established religious communities, notably Jews and Christians. That the arguments with the People of the Book reflect the atmosphere in Medina and the conflict with the Medinan Jews is also clear from the actual topics of disagreement with them. However, it does not mean that the Qur'ān in its entirety is polemical against other religious communities. Even at the time of grave disputes with Jews and Christians Muḥammad still takes the ecumenical view that believing monotheists who act according to the commandments of their religion, are like Muslims: they have nothing to fear on the Last Day. In Q.2:62, which is repeated in Q.5:69, it is said: "Truly those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness, shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve." The fact that this verse occurs at the beginning and end of Muḥammad's prophetic career at Medina means that "neither the words nor the purport of these two identical verses were abrogated."[50]

The question then is: Who/what are being criticized in the Qur'ānic polemical texts? This question becomes more acute as the Qur'ān seems to addresses its criticisms not to the

[50] Maḥmoud Ayoub, "The Qur'ān and Religious Pluralism," in Roger Boase (ed.), *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), p. 277.

"mainstream" Judaism and Christianity. A cursory reading of the Qur'ān could lead one to conclude that Muḥammad was ill-informed about or had misunderstood Jewish and Christian doctrines. Indeed, some of the Qur'ānic criticisms of the Jews and Christians have posed some difficulties for scholars. Let us take an example of the Qur'ānic criticism of the seemingly erroneous beliefs of Christians. Having warned Christians not to exceed the bounds in their religion, Q.4:171 continues: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and do not say, "Three." Refrain: better is it for you. God is only One God. Glory be to Him -- That He should have a son!" In another verse the Qur'ānic Jesus himself speaks out to disown the errors of Christians. When questioned by God as to whether he told people to take him and Mary "as gods, apart from God," he insists: "It is not mine to say what I have no right to" (Q.5:116). The Qur'ān also declares that "They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three" (Q.5:73). These passages seem to envisage that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity consists of God, Jesus and Mary, and could lead one to conclude that Muḥammad misunderstood the Trinity. The Christian concept of the Trinity is not polytheism, yet why does the Qur'ān include Mary as one of the three persons of the Trinity?

Some scholars maintain that the Qur'ān does not deal with the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity, but with the Trinity of heretical sects.[51] They therefore argue that the Qur'ān need not be thought hostile to orthodox Christianity *per se,* but only to certain distortions of it. In his short article published in 1967, entitled "Christianity Criticized in the Qur'ān," Montgomery Watt makes it clear that the Qur'ān attacks Christian heresies, rather than orthodox Christianity. He

[51] Heribert Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations,* trans. Allison Brown, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998), p. 23. See also S.K. Haddad, *The Principles of Religion in the Qur'ān and the Bible* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Inc., 1992), p. 59.

then concludes, "if the main contention of this article is sound, namely, that there is no primary attack on Christianity in the Qur'ān, then a widespread realization of this point has profound implication for the relations of Islam and Christianity now and in years to come."[52] Other scholars go further by saying that the Qur'ānic view of Trinity was in fact influenced by Christian popular religiosity and devotional practices which highly venerate Mary. It is possible, they argue, that the Qur'ān's idea of Mary's divinity might have come from Christian sects present in Arabia which exalted Mary far above her usual Christian status.[53] There is some evidence for the existence of such groups in Arabia, one of which was called the Colllyridians, composed mainly of women, who venerated and worshiped the Virgin Mary. They were originally from Thrace (the name given to that part of modern Bulgaria which lies directly north of modern Turkey), though they had spread north into Scythia and south into Arabia, and their central ritual involved the offering up of "small cake" (in Greek, "small cake" = *collyris;* hence the name Collyridians).[54] Geoffrey Ashe traces the Collyridians back to the Virgin Mary herself. In Ashe's account, the historical Mary, rebuffed by the early leaders of the Church, left Jerusalem and founded a community of holy women in some wilderness area. This community continued to flourish after Mary's death, especially in those areas (including Arabia) where the

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[52] W. Montgomery Watt, "Christianity Criticized in the Qur'ān," *The Muslim World* 57/3 (1967): pp. 197-201.

[53] See John Kalner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: an Introduction to the Qur'ān for Bible Readers* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical press, 1999), p. 272.

[54] See Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 43. According to Geoffrey Parrinder, "The Collyridians, an Arabian female sect of the fourth century, offered to Mary cakes of bread (*collyrida*), as they had done to the great earth mother in pagan times. Epiphanius, who opposed this heresy, said that the Trinity must be worshiped, but Mary must not be worshiped. The Qur'ān may well be directed against this heresy. It gives its support against Mariolatry, while at the same time it recognizes the importance of Mary as the vessel chosen by God for the birth of his Christ." See Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), p. 135.

influence of the early official Church was little felt.[55] Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the Qur'ān was influenced by their presence in Arabia.

Similarly, scholars have been perplexed by the Qur'ānic criticism of the sonship of 'Uzayr (Ezra?). The Qur'ān claims that "The Jews say, 'Uzayr is the son of God'; the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!" (Q.9:30). "The difficulty that presents itself," J. Walker points out, "is the fact that no historical evidence can be adduced to prove that any Jewish sect, however heterodox, ever subscribed to such a tenet."[56] Among Western scholars there are different theories to explain the Qur'ānic accusation that the Jews claimed 'Uzayr as the son of God. Lidzbarski, as cited by J. Walker, favors the possibility of a Jewish sect in Arabia venerating 'Uzayr to such a degree as to deify him; thus casting shame on their orthodox brethren.[57] The possibility that Muḥammad was aware of a Jewish sect that had elevated the figure of Ezra to angelic, perhaps even semidivine, status is also mentioned by Michael Lodahl. However, Lodahl is quick to note that "we need not assume that Jews in Muḥammad's milieu were actually worshiping the figure of Ezra or were even according him the title "son of Allah" – at least in any mystical or unique sense. For in fact the language of sonship, applied to the entire people of Israel, is not unusual in the Tanakh."[58] According to Reuven Firestone, there were two Jewish books, namely, 4 Ezra (also known as 2 Esdras 14:9, 50) and 2

[55] See Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-emergence of the Goddess* (London: Arkana, 1988).
[56] J. Walker, "Who is 'Uzayr?" *The Moslem World* 19/3 (1929), p. 303.
[57] Ibid., p. 304.
[58] Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'ān Side by Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), p. 38.

Enoch 22:11, which associate a near-divine status to the biblical personages of Ezra and Enoch.[59] Firestone then says, “It appears as if some members of Jewish sect espousing these beliefs were living in Medina at the time of the Prophet, which were immediately rejected and countered through revelation of the Qur’ānic verse.”[60] Other scholars propose an emendation of the text. Paul Casanova, for instance, reads ‘Uzayl instead of ‘Uzayr, and equates with ‘Azazel, who, according to the Jewish Hagada, is the leader of the “son of God (*b’nai elohim*)” of Genesis VI:2, 4.[61] This interpretation is supported by Steven M. Wasserstrom, among others.[62] J. Finkel suggests a different emendation, substituting z for r, and reads ‘Azīz (“king” or “potentate”) instead of ‘Uzayr. This emended text he connects with the verse in the Psalms (2:7): “The Lord said unto me, thou art my son; this day have I begotten three.”[63]

Even among Muslims, the Qur’ānic assertion that the Jews claimed ‘Uzayr as the son of God has created an exegetical problem. Muslim Commentators realized quite early that the Jews did not claim that ‘Uzayr was the son of God, however, they differed why the Qur’ān makes such a claim.[64] I would argue that if we understand the Qur’ānic statement as polemical, perhaps

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[59] Firestone further notes that “Although composed by Jews, both of these books were rejected by Judaism and did not become part of its canonical literature.” See Reuven Firestone, *Children of Abraham: an Introduction to Judaism for Muslims* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2001), pp. 35-36.
[60] Ibid. p. 36.
[61] Paul Casanova, “Idris et ‘Ouzair,” *Journal of Asiatique* 205 (1924): pp. 356-360.
[62] See Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew* (Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 183.
[63] See Walker, “Who is ‘Uzayr?” p. 305.
[64] Ṭabarī, for instance, says that Muslim exegetes are divided into two opinions. Some scholars argue that only one person who claims that ‘Uzayr was the son of God, namely, Finhas. For others, there were a group of Jews (*jamā‘a minhum*). Ṭabarī narratives on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, saying that Sallam ibn Mashkam, Nu‘mān ibn Awfā, Shas ibn Qays, and Mālik ibn al-Saif came to the Prophet and said: “How could we follow you while you have left our *qibla* and you don’t claim that ‘Uzayr in the son of God? On that occasion, this passage was revealed. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī explicates the passage in more polemical tone. He begins by asserting that the shirk of the Jews and the Christians by attributing a son to God is not different from that of idol worshippers, because there is no difference between one who worships the idol and other who worship Jesus or other human being. Rāzī alludes to the two opinions mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, but he adds a third opinion, that is, that such a view of ‘Uzayr as the son of God was prevalent among them and then disappeared. In this passage God retells the view from them. “The fact that the Jews deny such a belief,” he concludes, “proves nothing because God’s report concerning them is more accurate (than their denial).” Qurtubī attempts to resolve the problem by saying that “the statement ‘Uzyar is the son of God”

the problem of inaccuracies can be put aside. As is well known, polemical writings are intended not only to prove one's own viewpoint, but also to disapprove others' views even to the point of distorting descriptions so as to make them unacceptable. Polemics flourish in a specific communal milieu where individuals require the psychological assurance that their understanding of reality is the only right one. This deeper psychological attitude is what polemicists share in common, rather than the surface differences in their various beliefs. Similarly, scriptural polemic inevitably records the tension and arguments of specific events and times early on in religious formation. In addition, it is also possible that the Qur'ān refers to anti-Jewish polemics of the time. Walker argues that the Qur'ānic accusation might be derived from anti-Jewish polemics that had reached Muḥammad, especially through Samaritan polemicists. He asserts:

> If the idea did not germinate in Mohammed's own mind, and since it is quite alien to Judaism, it is obviously a slanderous accusation made against the Jews by their protagonists. I would suggest therefore that perhaps the libelers were none other than their old enemies the Samaritans, who hated Ezra above all because he changed the sacred Law and its holy script."[65]

The only problem with this theory is that 'Uzayr's role in the eyes of the Samaritans is usually negative; he is the deliberate falsifier of the Torah, whereas the Qur'ān does not criticize him, but those who venerated him. The fact that the Qur'ān juxtaposes him with Jesus gives the

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is general but is intended to mean specific, because there were no longer any Jews who made such a claim. Still, he continues, "even if only one of their chiefs said it, the evil of this claim would apply to them all." The well-known traditionalist and commentator Ibn Kathīr offers an unusual explanation, one that perhaps reflects more the long history of conflict between Muslims and Western Christendom than a carefully conceived and argued position. He writes, "This is (reported) by way of enticement by God of the believers to fight the unbelievers, either the Jews or the Christians, because of their ugly battles which they fought against God. As for the Jews, it was their saying, "'Uzayr is the son of God." Ibn Kathīr then cites the tale which has been repeatedly mentioned by Muslim commentators concerning the situation which led the Jews to claim such a status for 'Uzayr. According to the Muslim tradition, 'Uzayr was the most learned person among the Jews and was graced with the ability to reproduce the lost Torah. At the end, however, Ibn Kathīr admits that not all the Jewish Rabbis made such a claim, but only "some of the foolish among them (*ba'd juhalā'ihim*)." For a discussion of this, see Maḥmoud Ayoub, "'Uzayr in the Qur'ān and Muslim Tradition," in William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press, 1986), pp. 3-18.

[65] J. Walker, "Who is 'Uzayr?" p. 305.

impression that ‘Uzayr acquired such a high status. Early Muslim commentators even preserve the positive image of ‘Uzayr as the loyal restorer of the lost Biblical text. Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, whose account on ‘Uzayr is repeatedly followed by later exegetes, emphasizes the total conformity between the lost version of Torah and the one ‘Uzayr dictated.[66] Among Muslim polemicists, Ibn Ḥazm (d.456/1064) was the first “to make ‘Uzayr-Ezra into a wicked scoundrel who had intentionally corrupted the scriptures.”[67] (Ibn Ḥazm does not mention ‘Uzayr in his great compendium on religion and sects, though he fiercely attacks Ezra the scribe (*Azrā al-warrāq*). But in his epistle against Ibn Naghrilla, he explicitly identifies the same with the ‘Uzayr mentioned in the Qur’ānic verse.)[68] Lazarus-Yafeh suggests that the negative image of ‘Uzayr appeared in Ibn Ḥazm’s writings has a Samaritan source.[69] However, it is hard to imagine that the Qur’ān turns the Samaritan view of ‘Uzayr into a very positive light.

Even the much discussed issue of the Qur’ānic accusation of the falsification of previous scriptures is not easy to ascertain. The problem with the Qur’ānic account of scriptural distortion is that, as has been pointed out by Jacques Jomier, “the precise point of the accusation remains obscure.”[70] The Qur’ān makes an accusation that the Jews and Christians have distorted the original texts by placing texts not in the right places, and adds this accusation to their breach of

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[66] Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that the children of Israel had the Torah and the Ark of the Covenant. But as they abandoned the Torah, God effected it from their heart and removed the Ark, which contained the tablets on which it was written. He moreover afflicted them with a painful stomach ailment which caused them to forget completely the Torah. ‘Uzayr was a pious and learned man. He thus prayed that God would return the Torah to him. One day as he prayed, a light from God entered his body and the Torah returned to him. He taught the people the scriptures, and the Ark was also returned to them. When they compared what ‘Uzayr taught of the Torah with the text contained in the Ark, they exclaimed, “‘Uzayr was not so favored but that he be the son of God.” See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* (ed.) Mahmud Muhammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-ma‘ārif, 1954), vol.14, pp.202-203

[67] See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 68.

[68] See Ihsān ‘Abbās (ed.), *Al-Radd ‘alā Ibn al-Naghrīlā al-Yahūdī wa-rasā’il ukhrā li-ibn Ḥazm al-Andalūsī* (Cairo: Dār al-‘urūba, 1960), p. 72.

[69] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 61.

[70] Jacques Jomier, *The Bible and the Koran* (New York: Desclee, Inc. 1964), p. 32.

covenant (Q.5:13, 41). In other places the Qur'ān accuses some Jews and Christians of having willfully concealed part of their scriptures (Q.2:42, 140, 146, 159; 3:71, 187; 5:15; 6:91). We also find that the Qur'ān even suggests the possibilities of forgeries: "Woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, 'This is from God,' that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings" (Q.2:79).

Before proceeding to the discussion of why it is difficult to see the precise point of the accusation, it is imperative to discuss what accounts for the Qur'ānic accusation of the falsification of previous scriptures in spite of the fact that in the Meccan period their genuineness and authenticity are recognized. To put it in another way, what causes the shift in the Qur'ān's approach to the previous scriptures? The Dutch scholar Arent Jan Wensinck, in his *Mohammed en de Joden te Medina* (1908), argues that "In light of [Jewish] indifference and hate Muḥammad could conclude only that the Judaism with which he had daily contact was not the true one – that it was a deliberately falsified form of it, both in terms of its teaching and in the basis of that teaching, namely the book. Thus originated the frequent accusation about the concealing and the falsification of the Torah."[71] More than two decades later, the Danish scholar Frants Buhl elaborates on this idea as follows:

> This accusation was really the only way of escape for Mohammed out of a dangerous situation, when he came into closer contact with the Jews in Medina. He had from the beginning appealed to the evidence of the 'people of a scripture', i.e. the Jews and the Christians, as he was firmly convinced that the contents of the Old and New Testament coincided with what he preached on the basis of his revelations. But his ideas of incidents and laws in the Old Testament contained such misunderstandings that they naturally provoked criticism and ridicule from the Jews and thus he was put in a false position. If his expositions were contradictory to the old revealed scriptures, his claim to have received them by divine revelation was at stake. But as his consciousness of his prophetic inspiration was unassailable, there was only one thing for him to do, namely, to declare

[71] Arent Jan Wensinck, *Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina,* trans. Wolfgang Behn (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975), p. 94.

> that the Jews had maliciously corrupted their sacred books while he himself had given their true content.[72]

Both Wensinck and Buhl emphasize the point that the accusation of *taḥrīf* could best be understood as a result of the Prophet's disappointment with the Jews. At first he appealed to the evidence of the earlier scripture, but when the Jews ridiculed his claims, he began to accuse them of corrupting their scriptures. This explanation has been widely accepted by scholars. Lazarus-Yafeh, for instance, argues that "The contradictions between the Kur'anic and Biblical stories, and the denial of both Jews and Christians that Muḥammad was predicated in their Holy scriptures, gave rise to the Kur'anic accusation of the falsification of these last by Jews and Christians respectively."[73]

Certainly, the fact that the Jews and the Christians rejected Muḥammad's prophetic mission raises a very important question, for the Qur'ān claims that it confirms the Torah and/or the Gospel. The question then is: If the Qur'ān is the confirmation of the earlier scriptures, why do the Jews and Christians, who read those scriptures, not accept the Qur'ān as revelation and therefore also acknowledge Muḥammad as a Prophet? David Marshall identifies two Qur'ānic responses to this question. Firstly, some passages suggest that the actual text of their scriptures has been tampered with. For example, in response to Jewish unbelief in Medina the Qur'ān commends:

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[72] Frants Buhl, "*Taḥrīf*," in M.Th. Houtsma, et al (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), vol. 4, p. 618. In his brief note on the question of *taḥrīf* in the Muslim literature, Donner states: "The Islamic theological doctrine of *taḥrīf,* or distortion of God's earlier revelations by Jews and Christians, can be seen as a reaction against those groups' insistence that a true prophet had to be foretold by earlier prophets. The doctrine of *taḥrīf* makes it possible for Muslims to claim that Muhammad had been foretold in the Torah and Gospel, but that references to him had been affected in the course of transmission of those texts by the *ahl al-kitāb.* The doctrine of *taḥrīf* thus grows out of this polemical context, which seems already to have roots in the Qur'ān." See Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998) p. 150.

[73] Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrah," in Th. Bianquis, et al (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* New Edition, (Leiden, Brill, 1998), vol. 10, p. 394.

> Are you then so eager that they should believe you, seeing there is a group of them that hear God's word, and then knowingly distort it (*yuharrifunahu*) after they have understood it? (Q.2:75)
> So woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings (Q.2:79)

Secondly, other passages suggest that the People of the Book are consciously evading the testimony in their scriptures to the truth brought by Muḥammad in the Qur'ān. This idea is vividly conveyed at Q.2:101: "When there has come to them a messenger from God confirming what was with them [i.e. their scripture], a group of them that were given the book throw the book of God behind their backs, as if they did not know." In a similar vein, other passage speaks of those who "hide" the truth in the earlier scriptures (Q.2:174; 2:159). Such passages, Marshall argues, seem to imply that there is nothing wrong with the Torah and the Gospel in themselves, but that the problem lies with the way in which Jews and Christians approach these scriptures.[74]

I would add, however, that in Medina earlier passages about the previous scriptures were frequently remodeled to fit into the polemical-apologetic needs of the emerging community, which was now challenged by learned representatives of older monotheistic traditions. And the Qur'ānic polemics found fertile soil since the accusation that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures "was a widespread polemical motif in pre-Islamic times, often connected with the translations and quotations of scriptures, and used by sectarian and traditional authors, including Samaritans and Christians, to discredit various opponents and Scriptures."[75] William Adler argues that "In the first three centuries, Christian writers often charged the Jews with falsifying

[74] Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'ān," pp. 19-20.
[75] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds,* pp. 19-20.

their version of the Bible."[76] The polemical charge of falsification between Christians and Jews, as Irven M. Resnick notes, continued until the Middle Ages.[77] Since the charge of a falsification of scriptures had been in the air for some time, it is hardly surprising that the Qur'ān does not pinpoint the precise target of the accusation.

However, the general assumption about the progress of controversy from the language of confirmation (Meccan passages) to falsification (Medinan passages) does not convey the whole story. For, even in the Medinan period there are a number of Qur'ānic passages that confirm the previous scriptures. Addressing the children of Israel, Q.2:41 states "believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it." The term used here is *musaddiq*, which means confirming, attesting, or pronouncing to be true.[78] This active participle occurs several times in both the Meccan and Medinan sūras. What is striking is that it is only in the Medinan sūras that the explicit statement about the confirmation of the previous scriptures can be found. The subject of confirmation in those passages is generally "what I have sent down (*mā anzaltu*)" or similar phrase. For example, the Torah appears as the object of confirmation in three passages, namely, Q.3:50, 5:46 and 61:6. Whereas in the Medinan passage (Q.3:50), it is the Qur'ān which confirms the Torah (*muṣaddiqan limā bayna yadayya min al-tawrā*), in the Meccan passage (Q.61:6) it is Jesus' claim that "O, Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me."

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[76] William Adler, "The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemic," in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Anneberg Reseach Institute* (May 15-16, 1989), *A Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement: 1990* (Philadelphia), p. 1.
[77] See Irven M. Resnick, "The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics," *Medieval Encounters* 2-3 (1996): pp. 344-380.
[78] Wansbrough renders *muṣaddiq* as "verification of earlier Prophets and scriptures." See Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, p. 65.

Perhaps, it is this strong, explicit statement of confirmation and vague statement of falsification that leads scholars like W. Montgomery Watt to conclude:

> … that the Qur'ān does not put forward any general view of the corruption of the text of the Old and New Testaments. It makes clear allegations of the concealment of passages. It also make the accusations of *taḥrīf* ("corruption" or "alteration"), but by this does not mean tampering with the written text (except perhaps in copying it), but – to judge from the examples – means the employment of various tricks in the course of dealings with Muslims.[79]

Therefore, I am inclined to argue that the Qur'ān elaborates on the question of scriptural falsification or its criticism of some Jewish-Christian beliefs for polemical needs; it strives to prove that Islam provides the framework for God's new chosen community, and that the children of Israel are no longer the only chosen community. It seems more likely that different accounts of the Qur'ānic criticism reflect different layers of polemics of the time. Viewed on its own terms, the Qur'ān does not claim to provide a precise description or definition of other religions, but it does speak to address issues of immediate concern, including the refutation of erroneous beliefs. As Jacques Waardenburg points out, "The key problem of why Muḥammad provides so little information about Christianity [and also Judaism], and provides even information which does not represent orthodox Christianity, is that Muḥammad was simply not interested in it,"[80] since he already had his own religion as a religious purification and reform movement. Muḥammad seems to present himself a prophetical reformer. He disassociated himself from the travails of a long bout of pagan polytheism and presented his mission as "a self-described return

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[79] Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," *Transactions: Glasgow University Oriental Society* 16 (1955-1956), p. 53.

[80] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perception of Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 4; see also Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 96.

to an original monotheism exemplified in Abraham."[81] As a reformer he only saw of the religions and the Jews and Christians what was objectionable in his view and what should be reformed.

In this context the Qur'ān puts forth a polemical argument that there is "deviation" and "distortion" in both Judaism and Christianity from the pure monotheistic religion of Abraham, and hence Muḥammad's mission is to bring forth a faith in line with that of other Prophets before him. There are, at least, two related implications of the discussion of the polemical context of the Qur'ān. Firstly, the Qur'ānic polemics against Jews and Christians show the extent to which Muḥammad was familiar with a large number of religious and cultural terms of those surrounding communities. For many scholars, it would be natural that the Qur'ān "borrowed" such terms from Jewish and Christian sources.[82] The point here is not to prove or reject this theory of "borrowing", but to highlight that the study of scriptural polemics is helpful in our attempt to reconstruct the religious scenario of early periods in the development of religious communities. Secondly, the emergence of Islam should not be viewed as distinct from the process of the emergence of the other divisions of monotheism. In other words, the origins of Islam cannot be understood without taking into account a pattern of creative interaction with the other Near Eastern monotheistic faiths.

[81] F.E. Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 119. Peters calls both Muhammad and Jesus reformers because they attempted to reform the religious culture of their days. They differed, in Peters' view, in such that Muhammad's reform was profoundly conservative in a sense that he called for return to a pristine past, while Jesus' reform was forward-looking and progressive in such a way that although that "he strongly disapproved of what we may call extreme Pharisaism, he never disavowed the Pharisees, or any other Jews, as such."

[82] The literature on "borrowing" thesis has been discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. Fred Donner calls scholars who view the relationship in terms of Islam's "borrowing" from earlier monotheistic faiths "traditional orientalists." See Fred Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," pp. 9-10.

The Qur'ān therefore presupposes to some extent a basic knowledge of Biblical stories in its hearers. It also gives the impression of being addressed to an audience which could supply the missing details to which the text only alludes. The Qur'ānic text frequently lacks words or units of information which might otherwise be considered essential to a clear expression of meaning. In the case of the scriptural falsification, an issue which becomes a central theme of polemics among later Muslims, the reader usually encounters ambiguity about many parts of a sentence, including the identity of the subject and object, and the nature of the central action. Of course, it is easy for us, thinking about this issue fourteen centuries later, to see in this accusation contradictions and tensions. We must remind ourselves that in Muḥammad's time, different religious sects accused one another in such a polemical environment.

In fact, the Qur'ān seems to respond to the divergence of polemical statements which had been in the air for a while, which resulted in sectarianism, disputes, and differences among the Jews and Christians on the one hand, and among divergent sects within Judaism and Christianity themselves on the other.[83] At least, some Medinan verses are concerned with the nature of their differences about early scriptures: "We certainly gave the book to Moses, but differences arose therein: had it not been that a word had gone forth before from their Lord, the matter would have been decided between them, but they are in suspicious doubt concerning it" (Q.11:110).

[83] It is worth noting that polemical confrontations took place not only between different religious communities, but also different sects within one religious community. Bart D. Ehrman discusses at length controversies in early Christianity as follows: "In the second and third centuries there were, of course, Christians who believed in only one God; others, however, claimed that there were two Gods; yet others subscribed to 30, or 365, or more. Some Christians accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as a revelation of the one true God, the sacred possession of all believers; others claimed that the Scriptures had been inspired by an evil deity…. Some Christians believed that Christ was somehow both a man and God; others said that he was a man, but not God; others claimed that he was God, but not a man; others insisted that he was a man who had been temporarily inhabited by God." See Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

The words “but differences arose therein” seem to refer to the different Jewish sects who differed in their views on certain theological conceptions. The reference to the differences between the “People of the Book” is directly mentioned in Q.2:207. It seems that the Qur’ān takes up the issue of religious polemics because it serves very well its main purpose, that is, to restore and uphold a monotheistic religion taught by Abraham. The Qur’ān claims that the mission of Muḥammad was to clear up to them their disputes and differences: “We have sent down the book to you, only because you may explain to them what they differed about, and (so that it may be) guidance and mercy for those who believe” (Q.16:64). Moreover, the Qur’ānic polemics against the Jews and the Christians are not limited to theological issues. It is a mistake to assume that the Qur’ānic resentment of the Jewish and Christian social behaviors is secondary to its theological polemics, but rather it is part and parcel of the Qur’ān’s response to their refusal to acknowledge Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. The Qur’ān contends that “many of the rabbis (*al-aḥbār*) and monks (*al-ruhbān*) eat up the wealth of the people by false means and prevent (them) from the way of Allah. As for those who accumulate gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God, give them the ‘good’ news of a painful punishment” (Q.9:34). The Qur’ān also condemns especially the Jews because of their “taking usury when they were forbidden from it and of their devouring of the properties of the people by false means” (Q.4:161).

The Qur’ān attributes these socially and economically oppressive practices to their arrogance as being the chosen people, claiming that they were “friends of God to the exclusion of other people” (Q.62:6); they also call themselves “the children of God and His love ones” (Q.5:18). Whenever they committed sins, they would say that their punishment will not last but for a few days: “The Fire shall not touch us except for a few days” (Q.2:80; 3:24). Again, here, the question is not whether it is historically an accurate accusation. The Qur’ān just makes a

polemical statement, which may not really mean what it appears to mean. The main issue here is that the Qur'ān rejects the Jewish and Christian claims of being "the children of God and His love ones" because "Why then does God punish you for your sins?" The truth is that "you are but human beings of those He has created" (Q.5:18). The Qur'ān further questions the assumption that the punishment and reward have something to do with a special relationship between God and any of particular groups of mankind: "Whoever commits evil and his sin has surrounded him, he is among the dwellers of the fire" (Q.2:81).

The tone of these passages seems to be polemical in nature which reflects the Prophet's experiences toward those who reject his prophetic mission. The fact that the Qur'ān often times uses a harsh language in its polemics should not surprise us. This phenomenon is not unique to the Qur'ān. As Norman A. Beck puts it, "Polemic against other religious groups is common in the sacred scriptures of religious communities. This polemic ranges from the subtle and abstruse to the overt and bitter."[84] Polemics are a basic part of monotheistic scriptures, and arguments and accusations are found in the many layers of religious literatures that exist outside the canon of our respective scriptures as well. To mention just one example, we read the following passages from the Gospel of John (8:31, 37, 44, 47):

> Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, … "I know that you are descendents of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word…. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies…. Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.

[84] Norman A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: the Recognition of Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1985), p. 21.

Like the Qur'ān's polemics, these passages should not be read in isolation from the larger context of what is generally termed as a painful "parting of the ways." That is to say, the New Testament needs to be understood and interpreted with reference to a historical process in which Christianity emerged from a Jewish matrix and developed into a distinct and separate entity.

Our purpose here is to show that the Qur'ānic polemics are closely connected with the negative response Muḥammad received from his surrounding communities, especially the Jewish and Christian communities. It has often been observed that the development of an individual and independent identity is impossible without positioning it in relation with something different. It has also been observed that the uniqueness of the one, unfortunately, is often constructed by defining it comparatively with an "other," which inevitably defines the "other" negatively. S.D. Goitein describes this point as follows: "Muḥammad's definitive pronouncement on the relationship of Islam with other religions, Christians and Jews, had to receive the status of unbelievers and therefore they had to be charged with deadliest of sins: polytheism."[85] In fact, in many Medinan sūras the Jews are often mentioned together with the *mushrikūm* (polytheists);[86] they are called *al-qawm al-kāfirūn* (disbelieving folk),[87] *al-qawm al-ẓālimūn* (the wrong doers)[88] and *al-fāsiqūn* (the transgressors).[89]

Is the Qur'ān Supersessionist?

This question relates to the problem of rivalry between Islam and other religions. The Arabic term for 'supersession' is *naskh*, which technically means an abrogation of one ruling by a

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[85] S.D. Goitein, "The Concept of Mankind in Islam," p. 83.
[86] Q.2:105; 98:1, 6.
[87] Q.5:68.
[88] Q.5:51; 46:10.
[89] Q.3:110; 5:13, 59, 62, 66; 7:169.

subsequent ruling.[90] Some Muslim scholars extend this concept to include the supersession of Islam over all other religions. By presenting Islam as the continuation of the true monotheist religion taught by Abraham, this gives the impression that the coming of Islam led to an almost complete break with the past in those places where it established itself. Indeed, exclusivist Muslims often cite the seemingly exclusivist verses of the Qur'ān as "proof-text" of the superseding validity of the Islamic revelation over Judaism and Christianity. One of such verses is Q.3:85, which says "Whoever desires a religion other than *islām,* it shall not be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he shall be among the losers." Referring to this verse, Maḥmoud Ayoub rightly notes that Muslim exegetes "have used the verse to argue for the finality and supersession of Islam over all other religion."[91] In an attempt to demand unquestioning acceptance of the new faith, Muslims had to develop terminology as well as methodological stratagems to circumscribe those verses of the Qur'ān which tended to underscore its ecumenical thrust by extending salfivic authenticity and adequacy to other monotheistic traditions. Ibn Kathīr, for instance, argues that, based on Q.3:85, nothing other than Islam was acceptable to God after Muḥammad was sent. Although he does not appeal to the concept of abrogation as evidence, his conclusions obviously point to the idea of supersession when he states the salvific state of those who preceded Muḥammad's declaration of his mission. Ibn Kathīr maintains that the followers of previous

[90] Muslim scholars usually refer to a number of Qur'ānic verses as the basis for this concept, the most important of which is "We do not abrogate a verse [of the Qur'ān] or cause it to be forgotten, but We bring a better one or similar to it" (Q.2:106). Muslims holds that this verse indicates that certain Qur'ānic rulings or verses could be, and in fact were, abrogated. For a critical discussion of this verse, see John Burton, "The Exegesis of Q.2:106 and the Islamic Theories of *Naskh*: *mā nansakh min āya aw nansaha na'ti bi khairin minhā aw mithlihā," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48/3 (1985): pp. 452-469. For further discussion of the theory of *naskh*, see Burton, "The Interpretation of Q.87, 6-7 and the Theories of *Naskh*," *Der Islam* 62 (1985): pp. 5-19; idem, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[91] Maḥmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), vol.2, p. 241.

religions and their submission to a rightly guided life guaranteed their way to salvation only before the advent of Islam.[92]

The phenomenon of one scripture superseding another in part or in whole is not unique to Muslim discussion of other religions. This notion of supersession "stems from late Antiquity, and was used especially in Christian polemics against Judaism."[93] Basically, "supersessionism," or also known as "replacement theology,"[94] holds that since Christ's coming, the church has occupied the place of favor that formerly belonged to the Jewish people, and that God has abrogated God's covenant with the Jews on account of their rejection of the Gospels. There is general agreement among church historians that supersessionism originated and developed early in the church's history.[95] Some even argue that it began with the teachings of the New Testament writers.[96] Commenting on supersessionistic polemic in the New Testament, Norman A. Beck asserts:

> Polemic of this type is to be expected within religious literature, particularly within religious literature that is developed during the formative period of a religious community when the leaders of the religious community are establishing their identity and their newness over against parent groups in competition within them. Since the principal

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[92] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 1998), vol.1, p. 103. For a brief discussion of his view, see Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christian,* pp. 119-120, 127-128; Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 32.

[93] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 35.

[94] Ronald Diprose views the titles "supersessionism" and "replacement theology" as being synonymous. He also notes that the title "replacement theology" is a "relatively new term in Christian theology." Ronald Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), p. 31.

[95] According to Alister McGrath, a "wide consensus" existed in the early church that "the church is a spiritual society which replaces Israel as the people of God in the world." See McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 461-62.

[96] Bruce Waltke, for example, asserts that the New Testament teaches the "hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant." Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in John S. Feinberg (ed.), *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), p. 274.

parent of the religious community that produced the New Testament is Jewish, most of the supersessionistic polemic of the New Testament documents is anti-Jewish.[97]

The origin of supersessionism is a complex topic. What is interesting to note is that even though the theology of supersession has been "an accepted position of a majority within Christendom from postapostolic times until the middle of the nineteenth century,"[98] there have been continuous efforts to re-interpret and overcome it. As Peter Ochs declares, "Over the last two decades, denominational assemblies have mostly done away with the traditional doctrine that Israel's election has been transferred to the church."[99] Especially important has been the *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Times") of the Second Vatican Council. This document of the Roman Catholic Church declared that the Jews, among others, have not been rejected by God: "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scripture."[100] *Nostra Aetate* has indeed been followed by similar declarations from Protestant churches, some of which are clearly nonsupersessionist.[101] In 1987, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a document which declares, *inter alia,* "We affirm that the church, elected in Jesus Christ, has been engrafted into the people of God established by the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, Christians have not replaced Jews."[102]

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[97] Norman A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament*, p. 284.
[98] Diprose, *Israel in the development of Christian Thought,* p. 32.
[99] Peter Ochs, "Judaism and Christian Theology," in David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), p. 618.
[100] For an English translation of the document, see *The Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,* commentary by Rene Laurentin and Joseph Neuner, S.J. (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 13.
[101] Some of these declarations are mentioned in Helga Croner (ed.), *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist, 1985).
[102] See *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews* (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1987), p. 8. For an evaluation of the document, see R. Hann, "Supersessionism, Engraftment,

As a result, supersessionism's grip on the Christian church as a whole has been lessened significantly. This situation, especially when compared with Islam, could lead scholars such as William Nicholls to assert that "whereas some Christian theologians have begun to criticize their own theology of supersession, there is no sign of Muslim theologians even beginning to do so."[103] I agree that the negative tones prominent in the church's traditional view have been greatly muted. However, the statement "there is no sign of Muslim theologians even beginning to do so" is simply too bold a generalization. A similar simplistic view is held by Tim Winter (whose Muslim name is Abdul-Hakim Murad) who calls the doctrine of the abrogation of earlier religions as "the consensus of Sunnī and Shī'ī scholarship."[104] I would argue that the doctrine of supersession has never been agreed upon and some Muslim reformers have begun to challenge this dominant view of Islam superseding the previous religions. These reform-minded Muslims have wrestled with the polemical texts of the Qur'ān which were revealed in seventh-century Arabia while at the same time engaged critically with the modern context.

For the moment, let me mention that those who accept the notion of supersession of the previous Qur'ānic revelations depend on a tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d.68/687) which suggests a change in the divine attitude toward previous religions on the assumption that Q.3:85 has abrogated other Qur'ānic verses that seem to extend salfivic promise to other religious communities, such as Q.2:62, 5:48, and 5:69. However, even classical exegete Ṭabarī rejects the opinion attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, arguing that such abrogation as incompatible with the concept

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and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: reflections on the Presbyterian Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27 (1990): pp. 327-342.

[103] William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: a History of Hate* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1993), p. 284.

[104] Tim Winter, "The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9/2 (1999), p. 135. In page 146, Winter says: "Working with the scriptures, and informed by this triumphalist reading of history, the jurists and *kalam* theologians of medieval Islam maintained a consensus that the earlier versions of faith have now been rendered invalid (*batil*)."

of divine justice.[105] Another medieval scholar Abū Ja'far al-Tūsī (d.460/1067) supports the argument that God will not withdraw His salvific promise once He has made one.[106] Abdulaziz Sachedina is one of those modern Muslim scholars who vehemently reject the notion of supersession of Islam over other monotheistic religions. His basic assumption is that the Qur'ān does not see itself as the abrogator of the Jewish and Christian revelations. He argues that the Qur'ān is silent on the question of supersession of the previous Abrahamic revelations through the emergence of Muḥammad. He says,

> There is no statement in the Qur'ān, direct or indirect, to suggest that the Qur'ān saw itself as the abrogator of the previous scriptures. In fact, even when repudiating the distortions introduced in the divine message by the followers of Moses and Jesus, the Qur'ān confirms the validity of these revelations and their central theme, namely, 'submission' founded upon sincere profession of belief in God.[107]

How does then supersessionist theology become a dominant view in Islam? Sachedina offers, at least, two possible explanations. Firstly, like many other Muslim scholars, he is quick to note that Islam's supersession of Christianity not only mirrors the Christian supersession of Judaism, but also might have been influenced by Christian debates. He acknowledges that it is difficult to ascertain the level of Christian influence over Muslim debates about the supersession of the previous revelations. Nevertheless, he asserts that "It is not far-fetched to suggest that debates about Islam superseding Christianity and Judaism, despite the explicit absence of any reference to the issue in the Qur'ān, must have entered Muslim circles through the ardent Christian debates about Christianity having superseded Judaism, especially since Christians

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[105] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 155.

[106] For a further discussion on this, see Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 118-120; Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Is Islamic Revelation an Abrogation of Judaeo-Christian Revelation?: Islamic Self-identification in the Classical and Modern Age," *Concilium* 3 (1994), pp. 94-102.

[107] Sachedina, "Is Islamic Revelation an Abrogation of Judaeo-Christian Revelation?: Islamic Self-identification in the Classical and Modern Age," p. 96.

claimed to be the legitimate heirs to the same Hebrew Bible that was the source of Jewish law."[108]

Secondly, the sectarian milieu of Arabia in the early development of Islam contributed to the hardening of Muslim position against the authentic claims by other monotheists like the Jews and the Christians. This encounter, which produced inter-religious polemics, in addition to the establishment of Islamic public order where Muslims enjoyed a privileged position, led to the notion of independent status of Islam as unique and perfect version of original Abrahamic monotheism. The universally accepted notion that emerged from these polemics was the doctrine that the Qur'ānic revelation completed the previous revelations, which had no more than a transitory condition and a limited application. Such a notion also led to the doctrine of supersession among some Muslim theologians, who were involved in the routinization of the Qur'ānic message about "Islam being the only true religion with God" (Q.3:19) in the context of the social and political position of the community. Sachedina notes "It is remarkable that in the absence of any explicit statement of the Qur'ān in support of the subsequent Muslim belief that the Islamic revelation has superseded the previous revelations, and hence that only Islam should prevail as the true religion, Islamic jurisprudence has extrapolated a number of 'exclusivist' and 'communalistic' rulings based on the otherwise tolerant Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* traditions." [109]

Here we see that Sachedina acknowledges an apparent contradiction between some verses of the Qur'ān recognizing the authenticity of previous religions and others declaring Islam as the sole source of salvation. In fact, both the opponents and exponents of supersessionist theology admit these contradicting Qur'ānic verses. Their difference lies in how to resolve this

[108] Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, p. 32.
[109] Sachedina, "Political Implications of the Islamic Notion of 'Supersession' as reflected in Islamic Jurisprudence," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7/2 (1996), p. 162.

apparent contradiction. Those who oppose the doctrine of supersession such as Sachedina tend to argue that when the Qur'ān is read in its entirety it "provides ample materials for extrapolating a pluralistic and inclusive theology of religions."[110] For those Muslims who support the supersession of previous religions like Tim Winter "An honest assessment of the Muslim body of scripture which collocates all the relevant passages and accepts the religiously necessary assurance that their reception by the tradition was not thoroughly misguided, appears to confirm the classical Sunnī reading of the revelation as a frankly supersessionist event, proclaiming the abrogation (*naskh*) of prior religion by Islam."[111]

However, it seems to me, that the dichotomy between supersessionist and non-supersessionist claims is too simplistic and rigid to do justice to the complex dynamics of the early encounter between Islam and other religions. When the discussion is framed in such a manner it seems that there are only two available options: either to believe in the exclusive claim of Islam, or to embrace Judaism and Christianity as equally acceptable religions, doing away with the theology of exclusivist salvation. Thus, as we examine various polemical passages, we need to ask what specifically is being superseded or replaced? Is the text arguing for the replacement of other religions by the advent of Islam, or simply some practices and institutions without necessarily implying a complete abandonment of the Jewish and Christian peoples? And if the passage does indicate the criticisms of specific elements of Judaism and Christianity, do those criticisms result in their being superseded religions?

Even from a cursory reading of the Qur'ān, one can easily exclude extreme statements of supersessionism and non-supersessionism. Although the Qur'ān seems to be so concerned with

110 Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, p. 26.
111 Winter, "The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths," p. 137.

the Jewish and Christian breach of their covenant as expressed in the language like "because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts grow hard" (Q.5:13), for example, it does not claim to supersede them as the New Testament claims to supersede the "old" covenant of the Hebrew Bible.[112] The Qur'ān certainly excludes most Jews and Christians from the very covenants they claim to represent and uphold by citing their lack of commitment to them (Q.2:124; 4:54-55; 5:12-14), but it does not claim to replace them. Rather, it claims to "correct" them and to provide a means of bringing errant monotheists (not to mention polytheists!) back to the proper path to God. Abraham, for example, epitomized the true monotheist who submitted himself fully to God's will. According to the Qur'ān, most Jews and Christians have lost sight of the true essence of the Abrahamic commitment.

Therefore, the Qur'ān's harsh criticisms of certain elements of Judaism and Christianity are not to be understood as their complete abandonment by God. Despite the passages that claim to represent Islam as God's chosen religion and its followers as "the best community that has been brought forth for humanity" (Q.3:110), the Qur'ān is not actually preoccupied with the chosenness issue as the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are. Recall that the Qur'ān often criticizes the Jews and Christians for their exclusivist attitudes to the believers.

> The Jews say, "The Christians have no ground to stand upon"; and the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground to stand upon," while they recite the same book (Q.2:113)
> They say, "Become a Jew or a Christian if you would be guided" (Q.2:135)
> And they say, "None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their desires. Say, "Produce your proof if you are truthful." Nay, whoever submits his face to God and does good deeds, he will get his reward with his Lord, there shall be no fear, no shall they grieve (Q.2: 111-112).

[112] The question of the New Testament having superseded the Old Testament has been subject to much discussion among scholars. However, it should be noted here that the New Testament and Gospels never claim to have superseded the Old Testament in terms of its canonical status.

In these passages the Qur'ān engages in a polemic by making the case that both Jews and Christians have forfeited their exclusive claims to being God's chosen. The Qur'ān rejects this claim of the Jews and Christians that they are alone who would enter the paradise, arguing that the paradise is not monopoly of a certain people. Certainly, the Qur'ān is polemical towards Judaism and Christianity, thus some of the pressing questions are: Is there any room for interpreting the polemical passages of the Qur'ān for non-polemical interactions among diverse religious communities in the modern period? If the scriptural polemics originally used to establish the new religion's identity, can they be interpreted differently in different contexts? Are they intended to apply to Jews and Christians, for example, living in other times and other places? These questions form the major concern of the next chapters.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter attempts to look at the Qur'ānic polemics as reflecting various phases of Muḥammad's encounter with Meccan pagans, Jews and Christians of Medina. We have observed that in the Qur'ānic revelation of the Meccan period there is no mention of opposition on the part of Jews and Christians. As a result, the Qur'ānic remarks on them are mostly positive in nature. It looks to them as the heirs of the Torah and the Gospel. In the Medinan period there comes a distinct change in the tone of the Qur'ān's references to the Jews and Christians. The reason for this difference in the character of the Qur'ānic passages is to be found in the changed condition of the Prophet's life. Muḥammad's controversies with Jews and Christians intensify as he gained some political grounds, especially after the famous victory over the Meccan army at Badr in the second year of the *hijra* (migration). The Prophet could now go his own way more independently of the Jews and Christians. After much controversy against the Jews and Christians, Muḥammad

was finally driven to declare that his religion was different from theirs, and from that time on, the former irenic language becomes contentious, polemic.

Most Muslim scholars do not welcome the emphasis on the environmental influence on the Qur'ān as it implies that the Qur'ān is of human rather than divine origin. They usually regard the Qur'ānic treatment of other religions as purely a religious one, and fail to see the political background of the Prophet's activity. However, I must point out at this juncture that even if we disregard the political activities of the Prophet, we still can trace a religious political development reflected in the substantially new reading of the earlier Meccan texts during the phase of the Prophet's Medinan activities.[113] Moreover, the fact that the revelations came in response to, and therefore reflect, particular circumstances does not necessarily detract from the belief in the Qur'ān's divine origin. Islamic scholarship has always implicitly acknowledged the relationship between the Qur'ān and its environment, and one of the exegetical sciences, namely the "occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)," was devoted to discussing the particular circumstances in which a verse was revealed in order to clarify its precise import. Some Muslims cite *asbāb al-nuzūl* "out of a general desire to historicize the text of the Qur'ān in order to prove constantly that God really did reveal his book to humanity on earth."[114]

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[113] Angelika Neuwirth has demonstrated convincingly that the Qur'ānic presentation of Mary (Maryam) and Jesus (Īsā) in the Meccan sūra (sūra al-Maryam) and the Medinan sūra (sūra Āl 'Imrān) differs significantly in such a way that sūra Maryam was remodelled to fit into more polemical environments in Medina. Such a re-reading of Mary and Jesus in the new perspective of sūra Āl 'Imrān, Neuwirth argues, "serves a 'political' purpose: to disempower the predominant Jewish tradition represented by Āl Ibrāhīm, whose weighty superiority in terms of scriptural authority had to be counter-balanced." See Neuwirth, "Debating Christian and Jewish Traditions: Embodied Antagonism in sūra Āl 'Imrān (Q.3:1-62)," in Otto Jastrow, Shabo Talay, and Herta Hafenrichter (eds.) *Studien zur Semitistik und Arabistik: Festschrift fur Hartmut Bobzin zum 60. Geburtstag* (Germany: Wiesbaden, 2008), p. 282. (281-303). See also Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and the House of Amran: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism," in Angelika Neuwirth, et al (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp.499-531.

[114] Andrew Rippin, "The Function of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51/1 (1988), p. 2.

Different levels of the Qur'ānic criticism certainly reflect not only the polemical environment out of which Islam emerged, but also the fact that the Qur'ān itself is polemical in nature to the extent that only certain Jewish and Christian doctrines are mentioned in order to be refuted subsequently. To see the Qur'ān as reflecting and rejecting temporary and aberrant beliefs in Judaism or Christianity is not necessarily to attribute error to it, although some Western scholars do not hesitate to speak of its "mistaken" or "inadequate" perception of Christianity.[115] In my view, this rather reflects the time bound and conditional nature of polemical texts. I conclude this chapter with Reuven Firestone's insightful comment as follows: "[W]hat is too often forgotten is the fact that every case of religious polemic occurs within a specific and limited historical context. Scriptural polemic inevitably records the tension and arguments of specific events and times early on in religious formation. Continuing to apply them to the current age is simply an error and misunderstanding of the role and meaning of scriptural polemics."[116] In light of this insight, the following chapters will closely examine how modern Muslim scholars re-interpret the Qur'ān's polemical texts in such a way that differs from classical and medieval exegetes. In particular, I will examine the extent to which their modern and local contexts have shaped the way they reinterpreted the Qur'ān's polemical texts for a non-polemical fashion, including the seemingly exclusivist claim of Islam as the only true path to salvation.

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[115] Watt states forthrightly that "it is clear that for a modern person the Qur'ānic perception of Christianity is seriously inadequate and at some points erroneous," and adds "it is important, however, that the Christian of today should not take this as a reason for denying that Muḥammad was inspired by God." See Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 24.

[116] Reuven Firestone, "The Way that New Religions Emerge," in *Trialogue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), p. 53.

Chapter Two
CONTESTING THE THEOLOGY OF EXCLUSIVIST SALVATION

The problem of the salvation of people of other faiths is undoubtedly one of the most widely treated in current theological literature. In addition to the more intense encounters among different religious communities in the modern era, the soteriological nature of religion is also the main factor which accounts for the constant attention that has been turned by modern theologians on the subject of the salvation of infidels. The notion of salvation, which is generally associated with Christianity, is inherent in the doctrine of soteriology to the extent that "religions, of every type and degree of spirituality, have claimed to offer it."[1] In this dissertation, the term "salvation" is understood in its general sense as deliverance from errors and sins and attainment of God's pleasure in this world and the hereafter. One must be careful, however, not to assume that all religions have the same conception of salvation.[2] In fact, one of the problems facing scholars when dealing with salvation in Islam is that Muslims have not traditionally spoken much about it. Unlike Christianity, as Frederick M. Denny rightly notes, "Islam does not possess a strong rhetoric of salvation, whether in the Qur'ān or later. Instead, it has a prominent rhetoric of submission and obedience under an utterly transcendent and just God."[3] Nevertheless, I must

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[1] W. Norman Pittenger, "The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Salvation, Part II," *Anglican Theological Review* 21/1 (1939), p. 40. For a comparative study of salvation, see Charles Samuel Braden, *Man's Quest for Salvation: An Historical and Comparative Study of Salvation in the World's Great Living Religions* (Chicago: Willet, Clark and Co., 1941).

[2] S. Mark Heim suggests that "it does make sense to speak of salvation in the plural," because the term can be approached from different perspectives. See Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 6.

[3] Frederick M. Denny, "The Problem of Salvation in the Qur'ān: Key Terms and Concepts," in A.H. Green (ed.) *In Quest for an Islamic Humanism: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Mohamed al-Nowaihi* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1984), p. 197. For a more elaborate discussion of this, see Frederick Denny,

point out that the Qur'an often refers to guidance (*hudā* or *hidāya*) as the most inclusive concept used to express God's initiative for human's salvation.

This chapter is not intended to discuss the question of salvation in the Qur'ān. Rather, assuming that it always is there in some sense,[4] I go on to ask such questions as: What does Islam say about the fate of those people who do not believe in the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahāda*): There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God? Does the Qur'ān portray the religion of Islam as the only true way of salvation? Is there room for interpreting the negative image of unbelievers (in Arabic, *kuffār,* plural of *kāfir*) in such a way that unbelief (*kufr*) is not to be considered as the mere cause of attack and damnation? To put it in a simpler way: Can others be saved? Certainly, these questions have been much discussed by Muslim theologians of the past and of the present times. But their responses to these questions have generally been framed in black and white that, according to Islam, non-Muslims are to suffer eternal damnation. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, even the Qur'ānic verses that seem to extend salvific promises to others have been interpreted differently to mean the opposite. In what follows, the complexity of reinterpreting the Qur'ān's exclusive truth claim of Islam will be further analyzed.

Al-Islām As the Only True Path to Salvation

As discussed in the previous chapter, with the gradual but speedy disengagement of Islam from Judaism and Christianity, the demarcation lines between the various religions became sharp and

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Community and Salvation: The Meaning of the Ummah in the Qur'ān (PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1974), especially chapter 4: "Salvation in Islam and in the Qur'ān", pp. 139-202.

[4] For a discussion of salvation in Islam, see W.R.W. Gardner, *The Qur'anic Doctrine of Salvation* (Madras: S.PC.K. Press, 1914); James Robson, "Aspects of the Qur'anic Doctrine of Salvation," in Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (eds.) *Man and His Salvation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973): pp. 205-219.

unmistakable. The dichotomy between belief and infidelity or believers and unbelievers progressively became a major theme in the Qur'ān. There are, at least, three Qur'ānic passages that have commonly been understood to support some kind of exclusionary and intolerant theological orientation. Such verses are:

> Q.3:19 : The true religion with God is *al-islām*. Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another. And whoever disbelieves in God's signs, God is swift at the reckoning.
> Q.3:85 : Whoever desires another religion than *al-islām*, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.
> Q.5:3 : This day I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My favor unto you, and I have approved *al-islām* for your religion.

It is only in these three verses that *islām* is referred to in the context of *al-dīn,* which is generally rendered as religion. These verses speak of *islām* being the only acceptable faith, and thus they have usually been invoked to claim the superiority of Islam to other religions and that the theology and rituals of Islam are the exclusive path to salvation. It is, therefore, hardly surprising to hear Muslims claiming that religions other than their own have no ground to claim any amount of religious truth in them.

Referring to these passages, Yohanan Friedmann asserts that from early generations "Muslims have come to believe earnestly that Islam was the only true religion."[5] In his discussion of orthodox Qur'ān commentators, both medieval and modern, Mahmoud Ayoub concludes that they "have used the verse [3:85] to argue for the finality and supersession of Islam over all other religions."[6] Another Muslim author describes "the dominant medieval theological position which can be fairly characterized as a strong commitment to the notion of 'no salvation

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[5] Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 34

[6] Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1992), vol.2, p. 241

outside of Islam'."[7] Scholars of *tafsīr* often construe the Qur'ān commentaries of different periods and of diverse sectarian backgrounds as producing a unified negative image of other religions. This chapter is an attempt to problematize the general assumption about the inherent supremacist view of Muslims as if their perception of other religions has not changed throughout the history of *tafsīr*. The main question this chapter deals with is: How do twentieth-century Muslim reformers understand the Qur'ānic *islām* as appears in the three verses mentioned above?

Rashīd Riḍā begins his explication of "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allahi al-islām*" (Q.3:19)[8] by addressing the question of what "*al-dīn*" means in this verse. Linguistically, the word "*dīn*" could mean "recompense" (*al-jazā'*), "obedience" (*al-ṭā'a*), and "submission" (*al-khuḍū'*). As for how *al-dīn* is related to other terms such as *milla* and *shar',* Riḍā explains as follows:

> [The *dīn*] is connected to the sum total of God's commandments (*al-takālif*) by which the servants (*al-'ibād*) subject themselves to God and in this sense it has the meaning of *al-milla* and *al-shar'.* It is said that that with which God obligates the servants is called a *shar'* from the point of view of God's postulating it and revealing it; it is called a *din* from the point of view of man's submitting to Him and obeying Him; and it is called *milla* with respect to its being the sum total of obligations (*jumla al-takālif*).[9]

Scholars have for a long time wrestled with the meaning of "*dīn*" in the Qur'ān. At different times, they have theorized that in some of its usages the term is a loan word from Hebrew, Ethiopian, Syriac-Aramaic or Iranian. Because of its uncertainty as to what *dīn* means, Toshihiko

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[7] Mohammad Fadel, "No Salvation outside Islam: Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism," in Mohammad Hassan Khalil (ed.) *Islam, Salvation and the Fate of Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), p. 5.

[8] It should be mentioned here that the word "al-islām" in the Qur'ānic phrase "*inna al-dīna 'inda allāh al-islām*" (Q.3:19) is read as "al-ḥanīfiyya" in Ibn Mas'ūd's reading. See Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993), vol. 2, p. 426; see also Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), p. 32.

[9] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: Dār al-manār, 3rd edition, 1947), vol. 3, p. 257.

Izutsu regards it as “one of the most controversial words in the whole Koranic vocabulary.”[10] According to Arthur Jeffery, the meaning of *dīn* as “religion” is of Persian origin, whereas “judgment” goes back to Hebrew.[11] I tend to agree with Izutsu that whereas this foreign origin theory is not impossible, it is also not impossible to explain its different meanings within the confines of the Arabic itself.[12] In this context, Riḍā’s explication of the term *dīn*, as cited above, is significant in that he acknowledges its different meanings from the etymological point of view. Even when connecting the *dīn* with what may be called the “*majmū‘ al-takālif*” Riḍā shows that such a connection has its own complexity because it depends on how one views God’s commandments.

Riḍā then proceeds with the definition of *islām*, saying that *islām* is the *maṣdar* of *aslama* which means “to submit” (*khada‘*) and “to surrender” (*istaslama*) and also means “to fulfill or execute” (*addā*).[13] Like the word “*al-dīn*,” the meaning of *al-islām* is subject to discussion among scholars. The great majority of writers are of the opinion that the term “*islām*” in the Qur’an is intended to convey the general meaning of submission or surrender.[14] One of the most and thorough and careful studies of the various forms of *s-l-m* as used in the Qur’ān and in pre-

[10] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies,1964), p. 220.
[11] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007 [1938]), p. 131-133.
[12] Other scholars such as Yvonne Haddad attempt to trace the development of the meaning of *dīn* in its occurrence in the Qur’ān in the chronology of Qur’ānic suras, suggesting “a progression and accretion to its meaning.” See Yvonne Haddad, “The Conception of the Term *Dīn* in the Qur’ān,” *The Muslim World* 64 (1974): pp. 114-123.
[13] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 3, p. 257.
[14] See, for instance, Tor Andrae, *Muhammad, the Man and His Faith* (New York: Harper Torschbooks, 1960), p. 67; Goldziher, *Le Dogme et La Loi de l’Islam,* trans. Félix Arin (Paris: Librarie Paul Geuthner, 1920), p. 2; Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin-Leipzig: 1926), p. 54-56. Mark Lidzbarki argues that Muhammad apparently borrowed the word from other languages and gave a new meaning to old Arabic words. For Lidzbarski, the original meaning of *aslama* is impossible to ascertain because it means nothing in and of itself, and therefore one must see it as entering into a condition or state. See Mark Lidzbarski, “*Salām* and *Islām*,” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* I (1922): pp. 85-96. Probably the most extreme interpretation of *muslim*, and thereby of *islam,* is that of D.S. Margoliouth. He argues that *muslim* was used before Muhammad to apply to the follower of the Prophet Musaylima, the word coming from that Prophet’s name. See D.S. Margoliouth, “On the Origin and Import of the Names Muslim and Hanif,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* xxxv (1903): p. 467-483.

Islamic poetry is Helmer Riggren's book entitled *Islām, Aslama, and Muslim.* Ringgren argues that both in the Qur'ān and in the pre-Islamic poetry the word "*islām*" has been used to mean "submission and self-surrender [which] are well known phenomena in religious life, and so is the feeling of total dependence upon God."[15] Charles C. Torrey calls into question the interpretation of *islām* as submission because "This was never a prominently appearing feature of the Muslim's religion. It is not a virtue especially dwelt upon in any part of the Qur'ān."[16] D.Z.H. Baneth also problematizes the common understanding of the verb *aslama* and its derivatives as "to submit, to surrender, to resign [to God]." He asks: "Is not a word expressing 'surrender", "submission", "resignation" as a name for the new religion far too spiritual for the social environment in which Muḥammad had to preach?"[17] Baneth rather offers an external meaning which posits *islām* vis-à-vis polytheism. However, as Jane Smith rightly notes, this scholarly discussion "fails adequately to present the range and variety of its understanding for Muslims."[18]

For Rida, referring to *al-islām* as *dīn al-ḥaqq* corresponds to all of the linguistic meanings of the word. To support his view, he cites Q.4:125: "Who is more excellent in [terms of] *dīn* than the one who submits his face to God, and he is beneficent, following the *milla* of Abraham as *ḥanīf*." Based on several verses in which Abraham is often described by *al-islām*, he

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[15] Helmer Ringgren, *Islam, Aslama, and Muslim* (Uppsala: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1945), p. 33. In page 30, Ringgren goes even further by saying that the word "*islām*" as a technical term of the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad can be traced back to as early as the Meccan verses. This is in contrast to the view of K. Ahrens who argues that the word "*islām*" as the name of Muḥammad's religion is late and relatively rare in the Qur'ān. See K. Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*(Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1935), p. 112.
[16] Charles C. Torrey, *The Commercial-Theological Terms in the Koran* (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1892), p. 102.
[17] D.Z.H. Baneth, "What Did Muḥammad Mean When He Called His Religions Islam? The Original Meaning of *Aslama* and Its Derivatives," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): p. 184. This article is also published in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *The Qur'an: Style and Contents* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001): pp. 85-92. Toshihiko Izutsu also discusses the word "*islām*" extensively in his various works. See Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran* (Tokyo: Keio University Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1957); *God and Man in the Koran* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964); and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).
[18] Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term "Islām" as Seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries* (Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), p. 32.

concludes “that the specification in the Qur’ān “Truly *al-dīn* with God is *al-islām*” comprehends all of the *milal* (plural of *milla*) that the Prophets brought, for it is their universal spirit on which they all agree, despite the diversity of some of the obligations and forms of behavior in them, and with which they have been enjoined.”[19] It is worth noting that Riḍā uses *milal* in this passage in distinction from *milla*. Whereas the former refers to the different regulations expressed to the people of the book in different ages, the latter is intended to mean the collectivity of God’s commandments. He then quotes ‘Abduh, whom he calls “*al-ustādh al-imām*,” as saying that “the true *muslim* in the judgment of the Qur’ān is he who is unblemished (*khāliṣan*) by the defects of associating others with God, sincere (*mukhliṣan*) in his actions and having faith, of whatever religious community (*milla*) he might be, and in whatever time and place he might be found.”[20] What is particularly interesting here is the way in which ‘Abduh understood *islām* as the universal spirit of *milal*. And this emphasis on the harmonious basis of all religions, as noted by Jane Smith, “is in contrast to the often-repeated theme of earlier [Qur’ān] commentators that the other Peoples of the Book had distorted the true revelation and *islām* would overcome, defeat and vanquish all other *adyān* [plural of *dīn*).”[21]

As will be discussed in more detail later, Riḍā is concerned with the disparity between the inclusiveness of the Qur’anic *islām* and the exclusiveness of existing religions, including a reified Islam. I use the term “reified Islam” here in its neutral sense, i.e. the making of Islam as a separate confessional identity. The verse “Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another” (Q.3:19) fits into the

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[19] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 3, p. 257.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term “islām” as Seen in a Sequence of Qur’ān Commentaries*, p. 192.

middle of Riḍā's discussion of what went wrong with Christianity and Judaism. For Riḍā, this part of the verse informs us about the cause of their departure from the true *islām* of the Prophets. As a result, the People of the Book became conflicting schools (*madhāhib*) and groups (*shiya'an*) fighting with one another over *dīn*, "in spite of the fact that *dīn* is one with no division (*tafarruq*) in it and no cause for diversity, let alone fighting."[22] It was the oppressive act of religious and political leaders (*ru'asā' al-dīn wa al-siyāsa*) and the spirit of sectarianism which caused fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub*) of each faction to the extent that *al-dīn* itself has disintegrated into the differing doctrines of sects and parties. Riḍā makes a direct reference to Christianity as follows:

> We, Muslims, believe that the *dīn* of Christ (peace be upon him) is *islām* in the sense of which we have mentioned, and its basis is *tawḥīd* (the unity of God) and *tanzīh* (God's transcendence). It was the leaders, spiritual and non-spiritual, especially Roman kings and bishops (*al-mulūk wa al-aḥbār al-rūmāniyyūn*), who, because of their differences, turned the one divine *dīn* into different factions conflicting with each other.[23]

Here he seems to be using *al-dīn*, i.e. the *dīn* of Christ, not in the sense of the individual response to God as discussed earlier, but in its reified form of sects and groups. Interestingly, Riḍā never talks about the supersession of Judaism and Christianity by *islām*, which became the major theme among earlier *mufassirūn*. Writing from the perspective of the twentieth-century he reminds the Muslims that "It is necessary for us not to forget about differences and conflicts that have afflicted us."[24] If the universal spirit of all *adyān* is *islām*, the question is then: Is it

[22] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 3, p. 258.
[23] Ibid., p. 259.
[24] Ibid. For a further discussion of Riḍā's view, see Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberalism and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), pp. 127-134; See also, for comparison, Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of "Others"* (PhD Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2007), pp. 187-190.

necessary for Jews and Christians to follow the reified Islam brought by the Prophet or are they sufficed to turn back to their own universal spirit?

It seems that Riḍā has anticipated this question, although his response is not straightforward. He argues that the Prophet urged the Jews of Medina to abandon what they had invented in their religion and turn to its essence, that is, submission of face (*islām al-wajh*) to God and sincere devotion to Him in their deeds.[25] This of course implies that the Jews were not asked to abandon their religion. Elsewhere Riḍā discusses at length whether or not the Prophets were required to follow the religion of another Prophets. Of course, the implication is that if the Prophets were not required, so too their people. In other words, the people of Moses are not required to follow the religion of Jesus, as the people of Jesus are not required to follow the religion of Muḥammad. According to Riḍā, it is possible to distinguish between "to believe (*āmana*)" and "to follow (*ittaba'*)." Since all of the Prophets were sent with the same message, Riḍā argues, "they were responsible to assist one another. When one of them came at a different time, he should believe in him and assist him with all his capacity. However, it does not mean that he must follow the *sharī'a* of another Prophet."[26] It is plausible to infer from this statement that the followers of one Prophet are required to believe in the prophethood of the latter but not to follow his teaching. What if they were sent in the same period? Riḍā quotes 'Abduh's response to a question posed to him whether the *sharī'a* of the latter abrogated the former:

> [The belief of one Prophet in an earlier Prophet] is neither abrogating the *sharī'a* of the former by the latter nor negating it. For, the purpose is merely to confirm his call and support him against anyone who tried to harm him. If the *sharī'a* of the latter contains an abrogation of part of what has been brought by the former, it should be accepted. What matters is his confirmation in terms of the principles (*uṣūl*) which are the same in all

[25] Ibid., p. 260.
[26] Ibid., p. 352.

> religions. Each one should perform with his people (*ummatihi*) the detailed practices of rituals, and that is not considered divergence and division in religion.[27]

In his commentary, Riḍā agrees with ʻAbduh's view and gives an analogy of two persons who carried different tasks given by a king at the same period. Undoubtedly, they should support one another although they were independent of each other. Each one believed in the other, in spite of the fact that he did not perform the other's duty. It is also the case with two Prophets. As for the question of an abrogation, Riḍā argues that it is not plausible that what has been brought by one Prophet is to be abrogated by another. An abrogation is only possible when they were sent at different periods. In that situation, the details of his *sharīʻa* (*furūʻ sharʻihī*) might be abrogated. Riḍā says, "It is evident from the nature of our Prophet's confirmation of the previous scriptures and what had been brought by them that the details of his *sharīʻa* (*sharʻuhū al-tafṣīlī*) are not totally in agreement with their *sharīʻa*s and that the Prophet was not supposed to acknowledge what their people practiced."[28]

On another occasion, Riḍā even goes on to say that belief in the Prophethood of Muḥammad is not a *sine qua non* for salvation. Commenting on Q.2:62, he explicitly rejects the idea that this verse implicitly stipulates belief in Muḥammad. In his own words: "… there is no problem for not stipulating belief in the Prophet because the verse deals with God's treatment of each people and community who believe in a Prophet and a revelation particular to them. Their salvation (*fawzuhā*) is certain whether they were Muslims, Jews, Christians, or Sabeans. God declares that salvation lies not in religious allegiance (*al-jinsiyya al-dīniyya*) but in true belief which has control over self and in good deed."[29] Riḍā echoes ʻAbduh's earlier statement about

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 353.
[29] Ibid., vol.1, p. 336.

the equitable nature of divine reward and chastisement. 'Abduh is reported to have said that, "the genealogy of nations and their religions and sects have no effect on God's pleasure or His anger."[30]

This brief exploration of Riḍā's view reveals the extent of his departure from the classical and medieval Qur'ān commentaries. Firstly, unlike earlier *mufassirūn* who attack the very principles of belief of other religious communities, notably Jews and Christians, Riḍā is concerned more with sectarianism and fanaticism that have caused conflicts and differences. He strongly calls Jews and Christians as well as Muslims to return to the universal spirit on which they all agree, namely, submission and obedience to the one God. He reiterates in several places the necessity of overcoming sectarianism and fanaticism by stressing "*kawn al-dīn 'inda Allah wāḥidan*" (that the *dīn* for God is one). According to 'Abduh, as cited by Riḍā, "the core theme with which the sūra (sūra Āl 'Imrān in which the verses "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*" appears) begins its revelation" is to overcome sectarianism.[31] He attempts eagerly to seek the unity among different religious communities. In fact, as noted by Albert Hourani, the appeal to unity is indeed the major theme which runs all through Muslim reformers' works.[32] Secondly, in terms of approach, the difference between the *Manār* commentary and the earlier commentaries is noted nicely by Jane Smith as follows: "While those of previous centuries quite clearly took the lines of the Qur'ān as their points of departure, sometimes at the expense of clear continuity from one passage of exegesis to the next, the *tafsīr* of Riḍā seems to be using the *ayah*s as a

[30] Ibid., p. 334. For a brief discussion on this, see Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 117.
[31] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 350.
[32] Referring to *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, a reformist journal published in France by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, Hourani writes about their concern as follows: "Differences of sect need not be a political barrier, and the Muslims should profit from the example of Germany, which lost its national unity through giving too much importance to differences of religion." See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age (1798-1939)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [1962]), p. 115.

proof for the point(s) he is making."[33] However, this does not mean that Riḍā puts the text into service of his own ideology, since the text itself opens the possibility for different interpretations.

While these two features that distinguish Riḍā's *tafsīr* from the earlier *mufassirūn* can also be seen in other reformist Qur'ān commentaries, one can sense a real difference in approach and emphasis that characterize Muslim reformers' major concerns. The Indian scholar Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, for example, addresses the notion of the unity of religion (*waḥdat-e-dīn*) more extensively than Riḍā does and makes it the basis of his inclusivist theology. Azad's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* is generally recognized as an important milestone in modern Qur'ān commentaries in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent.[34] In this *tafsir,* as Ian Henderson Douglas points out, Azad himself considers the unity of religion "the great principle which is the foundation of the message of the Qur'ān."[35] In a similar vein, I.H. Azad Faruqi asserts that "the most original, unique and also the most controversial thesis of Mawlana Azad in his interpretation of the Qur'ān has been the concept of the unity of religion."[36]

Before we discuss this idea of the unity of religion as explicated at great length by Azad in the commentary of *sūra al-Fātiḥa*, let us first look at how Azad deals with the meaning of "*islām*" in the Qur'ān. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the majority of Muslims at the present time understand Islam as a distinct religio-cultural system with more or less clearly

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[33] Jane Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term "islām" as Seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries,* p. 194.

[34] In the course of writing this dissertation I consult both the Urdu and the English editions of Azad's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. However, all quotations are from the English translation, unless otherwise noted. For the Urdu edition, see Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* edited by Dr. Zakir Husayn (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1964); for the English edition, see Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* trans. Dr. Syed Abdul Latif (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967).

[35] Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 209.

[36] I.H. Azad Faruqi, *The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of Maulana Abu'l-Kalam Azad's Approach to the Understanding of the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 92.

defined boundaries which separate it from other religions and cultures. Thus, in the context of the verse "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*," there is no salvation for the followers of other religions until they join their religio-cultural community, i.e., the Muslim *umma.* Unlike Riḍā who understands the term "islām" back and forth in its generic and reified conceptions, Azad explicitly challenges the common understanding of the reified reference of the Qur'ānic *islām.* According to his understanding, the Qur'ān invariably uses the term "islām" or its verbal forms in the sense of an attitude of submission, surrender, and obedience, and never in its reified form. It is this "islām" so continuously delivered throughout the ages which is the true *dīn* or way of life as fixed by God. When the Qur'ān states that *al-islām* is the only *dīn* favored by God and was the *dīn* which every Prophet preached, Azad argues, every other way or religion is bound to be groupism of some sort and not the universal way of God.[37]

In fact, Azad spares no pain to show, quoting extensively from the Qur'ān that the very idea of religion as a system has been emphatically negated in the Qur'ān. Azad argues that once a religion is transformed into a "system" (*niẓām*), it claims its exclusive right to salvation. He goes on to say that "Exclusivism came then into vogue everywhere denying to all except those who belonged to one's own group. In fact, hatred of another's religion replaced devotion to God and righteous living."[38] To support his argument, he invokes the following verse:

> And they say: 'None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' Those are their (vain) desires. Say: 'Produce your proof if you are truthful.' Nay, whoever submits his whole self to God and does a good deed, he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (Q.2:111-112).[39]

In his commentary of the above passages, Azad notes:

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[37] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* trans. Dr. Syed Abdul Latif (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967), vol. 1, p. 177.
[38] Ibid., p. 162.
[39] Other verses quoted by Azad to this effect are: Q.2:59, 80-81, 113, and 129; 3:74-75.

> The Jews used to assert that so long as one was not a member of the Jewish fold, there was no salvation for him. Likewise, the Christians used to assert that so long as one did not enter the Christian fold, there was no salvation for him. On the other hand, the Qur'ān asserts that salvation rests entirely on devotion to God and righteous living and not on adherence to any particular group. Every one who is devoted to God and lives righteously will get salvation irrespective of the religious group to which one belongs.[40]

For Azad, the Qur'ān states that the truth of God is but one and is meant for all and was indeed given to everyone. That truth bears no national stamps, and recognizes no racial or geographical loyalties or group affiliations. In other words, the truth is not exclusive to any race or people or religious group, and it is not selectively delivered in any particular language. Using a metaphor for the universal truth, he says "Like the sun created by God, it shines in every corner of the globe, and shines equally well on every one."[41] But in implementing it, mankind had divided themselves into numerous groups. The Qur'ān desires to bring everyone back to the universal and common truth and thus put an end to all religious strife. In one way or another, this is similar to what Riḍā calls "*al-rūh al-kullī*" on which all religions agree, as discussed earlier. However, what is this common and universal truth? Azad responds to this question arguing that what he means by universal truth is that success in life or salvation is achieved only through devotion to God and righteous living. It is this law of life which is the *dīn* prescribed by God, and it is this which the Qur'ān calls "*al-islām*."[42]

Azad's thesis is that the message which every Prophet delivered was that mankind were in reality one people and one community (Q.10:19 and 2:213), and that there was but one God for all of them, and that on that account they should serve Him together and live as members of

[40] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 40.
[41] Ibid., vol.1, p. 172. See also Azad, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'ān* (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1983), p. 100; Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence Abul Kalam Azad: A Fresh Look* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 174.
[42] Ibid.

but one family. Such was the message that every religion delivered. But curiously the followers of each religion disregarded the message, so much so that every country, every community, and every race resolved itself into a separate group and raised groupism to the position of religion. Azad cites a number of Qur'ānic verses, such as Q.23:23, 32, 45, 50-53, suggesting that all Prophets had aimed to affirm the unity of religion (*waḥdat-e-dīn*) and preach universal brotherhood.[43] Azad neither defines what he means by the term "*waḥdat-e-dīn*" nor does he give any particular source for his approach to the notion of the unity of religion, although the influence of *al-Manār* is apparent in his *Tarjumān.* One can also trace Azad's *waḥdat-e-dīn* within the Indian Muslim heritage, especially in the work of the eighteenth-century scholar Shah Waliullah al-Dahlawi. According to Asghar Ali Engineer, a prominent Muslim scholar of India, the concept of *waḥdat-e-dīn* was not unknown before Azad "as Shah Waliullah too refers to the concept of unity of religion in his *Ḥujjatullāh al-Bāligha*. Many Sufi saints like Niẓāmuddīn Awliyā and Mazhar Jan-i-Janan also refer to the truth of other religions like Hinduism, particularly in the Indian context."[44] What is distinctive about Azad, in my view, is that he devotes much of his scholarship to this very idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn*.[45]

Like Riḍā, Azad spends a great deal of time discussing the meaning of *dīn* as it appears in the verse "*inna al-dīna 'inda Allah al-islām*" and other places. He seems to be very familiar with the complex origins of the term "*dīn*" which have preoccupied Western scholars for a while. He

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[43] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol. 1, pp. 168-169.
[44] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Maulana Azad and his Concept of *Waḥdat-e-din*," in his *Islam in Post-Modern World* (Delhi: Hope India Publications, 2008), p. 80. See also Engineer, "Maulana Azad and His Concept of Unity of Religion," in his *Rational Approach to Islam* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2001), p. 31-32; Engineer, "Maulana Azad and Unity of Religion," in his *Religion, State & Civil Society* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2005), p. 140.
[45] For a brief discussion of Azad's influence on Asghar Ali Engineer, see Mun'im Sirry, "Compete with One Another in Good Works: Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5:48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20/4 (2009): pp. 423-438.

argues that the term “*dīn*” in Arabic which bears the meaning of requital or recompense might have originated in ancient Semitic languages, especially Aramaic and Hebrew.[46] As for the Qur’ānic usage of *dīn*, Azad contends that it has never been used as the name of any sectarian group. The real *dīn* is devotion to God, and hence it is not exclusive heritage of any single group (*firqa*). The Qur’ān calls the *dīn* of God “al-islām” because it means acquiescence, which all Prophets preached throughout the ages. Therefore, whatever the race or community or country one belongs to, as long as he believes in God and does deeds in consonance with that belief, he is a follower of the *dīn* of God, and salvation is his recompense.[47] What the people of the present time and of the past ascribe themselves to in terms of rituals and practices is not the real *dīn,* but “it was merely an outward aspect of it.”[48] To support his argument, Azad cites the following verse: “Surely, those who have made divisions in their *dīn* and turned into factions, you have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with God alone; then He will tell them what they have been doing” (Q.6:159).

The question arises: if the revelation has laid down but one and the same principle of life which the Qur’ān calls “*dīn*”, how then come in the differences which exist between one religion and another? The way Azad responds to this question is similar to that of Riḍā. Recall that Riḍā refers to *ru’asā’ al-dīn wa al-siyāsa* as the most responsible people who caused the *dīn* disintegrated into the differing doctrines of sects and parties. Azad on his part offers a similar explanation, saying that religious leaders corrupted original teachings and hence differences arose. Had they followed original teachings, these differences would not have been there.[49]

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[46] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān,* vol. 1, p. 89.
[47] Ibid., vol. 1, p.
[48] Azad, *Basic Concepts of the Qur’ān,* p. 88.
[49] Cited by Engineer, Maulana Azad and His Concept of *Waḥdat-e-din*,” p. 84.

However, the timeframe that Azad talks about is not the present context. Rather, he refers to a time when people turned away from the universal truth to an extent that they came to be divided into groups on the basis of interests, each hating the other, so much so "that the situation demanded the delivery of a message of truth" to re-unite them once again.[50] It was thus that the door of prophethood or revelation was opened, and a series of Prophets followed in succession to bring home to mankind the truth which they had neglected and suffered in consequence.

Here we see that Azad keeps emphasizing his main idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn* by repeating over and again that the message of these Prophets was one and the same and was not meant for any particular time or place or people. Speaking about the purpose of the coming of all Prophets, he writes: "The aim of every one of them was to gather together those who stood divided. It was never meant to keep them in isolation from each other. The primary purpose was to see that all mankind served one God and lived together in mutual love and affection."[51] This brings him to address the question whether the Prophet Muḥammad asked the followers of other religions to join his own faith. Azad deals with this issue in the same manner as that of Riḍā, as discussed earlier, yet his argument is more straightforward. He says:

> The Qur'ān has never asked the followers of other religions to accept it as a new faith altogether. On the other hand, it asks them to return to their own religions by first discarding all the aberrations that they have heaped thereon, and strictly adhere to the original faith. It then says: If they do so, the purpose of the Qur'ān is served; for, if once one returns to his own religion in its pristine form, he will find that there is nothing therein but what the Qur'ān itself has come forward to revive and represent." It says that its message is not a new message and that it is the same which the Prophets of yore had delivered.[52]

[50] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol.1, p. 153.
[51] Ibid., p. 155.
[52] Ibid., p. 174.

As for the Qur'ānic verses which seem to stipulate the necessity of belief in what has been revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, Azad argues that "it does so only to emphasize that the Qur'ān does not present anything antagonistic to their faiths, nor does it aim to turn them away from their own faiths, but that in fact even aids them to remain staunch to them."[53] Thus the task of the Qur'ān, according to Azad, is to revive the message of truth, since, although all religions are based on truth, their followers have turned away from it. So, the need arises to bring them back to it. However, there is tension in Azad's argument for the concept of *waḥdat-e-dīn* on the one hand, and the sheer fact of religious diversity in the real world in which we live on the other. It is true that there are numerous verses in the Qur'ān which speak of the unity of religion, but it is also true that there are verses which prescribe particular modes of worship and specific codes of conduct. As a matter of fact, each religion has its own rituals, customs, traditions, and so forth. The Qur'ān itself seems to approve this diversity as reflected in the verse "For each one of you We have appointed a law (*shir'a*) and a way (*minhāj*)" (Q.5:48).

It is noteworthy that Azad invokes this verse in support of his idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn.* The difference, he argues, is only possible in the sphere of *sharī'a* and *minhāj*, but not in *dīn*. A difference of this nature is not a difference touching the basic character of religion, but a difference touching its outward manifestation. Therefore, the term used in this verse is not *dīn* which should be the same for every one. For Azad, the Qur'ān tells us that the teaching of a religion is two-fold. One constitutes its spirit, and other its outward manifestation. The former is primary in importance, the latter secondary. The reason why he regards the latter secondary is because the "condition of circumstance of the human has not been the same in every clime and at all times. Intellectual and social aptitudes have varied from time to time from country to country

[53] Ibid., p. 175.

necessitating variations in *sharīʻa* and *minhāj*."[54] It is clear that Azad considers *sharīʻa* and *minhāj* which differ from one religion to another are not the spirit of religion. Consequently, people of different religions who perform their own *sharīʻa* and *minhāj* would attain salvation as long as they believe in the universal truth, namely, belief in God and living righteously.

Azad's discussion of the concept of *waḥdat-e-dīn* and its relation to different *sharīʻa* and *minhāj* has indeed troubled many Muslims, especially in India. Ghulām Rasūl Mehr, a well-known journalist and one of Azad's admirers, is reported to have asked Mawlana Azad to clarify whether he really wished to say that for salvation it was not at all necessary to believe in the Prophet Muḥammad and the mode of worship enjoined in the Qur'ān. Mehr reported that Azad, in his correspondence with him, has contradicted what he said in the *Tarjumān* concerning the distinction between the essential *dīn* and the particular modes of religious practices (*shirʻa* and *minhāj*). In line with the traditional explanation, Azad is reported to have said that Q.5:48 is concerned with the religious tradition of the past before the advent of Muḥammad. "For the future the Qur'ān's declaration is that the blessing (of God) has reached its final stage and this finality is not only with regard to the essential religion but also with regard to *sharʻ* and *minhāj*. And there is no scope for any change after finality."[55]

However, the attribution of this statement to Azad is questionable on several grounds.[56] Mehr published his book containing this statement only after the death of Azad. He claimed that

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[54] Ibid., p. 158.

[55] Cited by I.H. Azad Faruqi, *The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Approach to the Understanding of the Qur'ān,* p. 102. See also Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography,* p. 211.

[56] This is contrary to the view of some scholars such as Azad Faruqi and Ian Henderson Douglas who accept this report at face value. Douglas writes, "Azad's reply [to Mehr's inquiry] was a categorical affirmation of binding character of all Islamic beliefs and practices, and the unequivocal statement that the law revealed in the Qur'ān supersedes that of any other religions. This may have satisfied the 'ulama, but it undermined his argument in his

Azad wrote him this response five years after the publication of the first edition of the *Tarjumān* in 1930, which makes his report more spurious. For, in the second edition published in 1945, Azad claims to have thoroughly read the previous edition and added nothing contrary to his previous view. Instead, Azad even broadens his vision in the second edition. Other scholars who worked closely with Azad, such as Syed Abdul Latif, never talk about Azad's recantation of previous view. Abdul Latif not only translated the *Tarjumān* into English, but also summarized its first volume on sūra al-Fātiḥa, both of which were approved by Azad. Perhaps, the attribution of his recantation was made to expel doubts about his orthodoxy which had been raised after his death.

Between Inclusive and Exclusive Islam

These thoughts of Riḍā and Azad provide an example of innovative thinking that Muslim reformers have offered in their wrestling with the apparently exclusivist approach of the Qur'ān to other religions. They might have succeeded in their *ijtihād* (intellectual endeavor) to demonstrate meanings that prior exegetes had not articulated, but they have to encounter the wall of the conservative legacy of the past generations. In fact, the great fortress of orthodoxy is as difficult to break through as that of the Qur'ān. The advanced ideas put forward by 'Abduh, and later on by Riḍā and Azad, provoked the most rigorous hostility in orthodox and conservative circles which manifested itself not only in serious refutations but also in attacks on and intrigues against them. As a result, Muslim reformers wrestled with orthodoxy as much as with the Qur'ān itself.

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commentary on the Surat al-Fatiha in favor of the accommodation of other living faiths." See Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography,* p. 211.

The Syrian reformer Jamāl al-Din al-Qāsimī's approach to the Qur'ān's polemical texts illustrates some difficulties not only in dealing with polemical elements in the Qur'ān but also supremacist spirits which have characterized medieval Qur'ān commentaries. He offers a very brief explication of both Q.3:19 and 85. Qāsimī seems to understand *al-islām* in its generic meaning, but he also contrasts it with the religion of the People of the Book.[57] In his exegesis of Q.3:85, he understands "Whoever desires another religion than *al-islām*" as "other than unity (*tawḥīd*) and obedience (*inqiyād*) to God's command." However, hen then says "Whoever follows other than the Islamic religion and feels comfortable with it he falls into the worse state."[58]

This tension is more evident in the Lebanese Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya's exegesis. On the one hand, he attempts to offer an innovative interpretation as Riḍā and Azad do, but on the other hand, he seems to fall into the hold of orthodox *tafsīr*. Mughniyya's interpretation of the verse "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*" is illuminating. In his *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* he begins his explication with this question: Does the appearance (*ẓāhir*) of this verse not suggest that the religions of all Prophets, including the religion of Abraham, are nothing except the religion of Muḥammad, because what has been brought by Prophets was true and valid only to an extent that it was recognized by Muḥammad and the Qur'ān? Mughniyya responds to this question as follows: "In fact, this verse indicates exactly the opposite of what you just said. Its appearance tells [us] clearly that every religion brought by each one of the

[57] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Īsā al-bābī al-ḥalabī, 1957), vol. 4, pp. 811-812.
[58] Ibid., p. 880.

previous Prophets contains in its essence (*fi jawharihī*) the Islamic teaching to which Muḥammad called."[59]

Three arguments are put forth to support this view. Firstly, Islam in its reified form is centered above all upon three principles, namely, belief in God and His oneness, revelation and its infallibility, and resurrection and reward. Every one of us, Mughniyya contends, knows that all of the Prophets were sent with these principles, for the Prophet has said: "We, the community of Prophets, have one religion" (*innā ma'shar al- anbiyā' dīnunā wāḥid*). Secondly, the word "islām" has different meanings, including obedience, submission, and free of blemishes. And every religion brought by the Prophets, according to Mughniyya, is pure and free of blemishes. Thus, the religion of all Prophets can be called "islām." The third argument put forward seems to have no relevance to his view. He says that the source of the Qur'ān is one and hence there is no contradiction in its passages. Mughniyya then refers to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.40/661), who is reported to say that one should not understand a verse in isolation from others. "Rather, we must follow all verses which are related to the issue in question. We collect them all and derive one meaning therefrom."[60]

After elaborating these three arguments, Mughniyya concludes:

> When we look at Qur'ānic verses in which the word "islām" occurs in light of these realities, we find that in a number of verses God has characterized all Prophets with "islām." On that basis, we know that the specification in the verse "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*," refers to all religions. This specification is not applied to one religion and excluding other religions which were brought by Prophets from God. The reason for that is because all of the religions of the Prophets contain the Islamic teaching in their essence, namely, belief in God, revelation and resurrection. The divergence and

[59] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif* (Beirut: Dār al-'ilm lil-malāyīn, 1968), vol. 2, p. 26.
[60] Ibid., p. 26-27.

> difference occur only in the sphere of details (*furū'*) and laws (*aḥkām*), not in the sphere of principles (*uṣūl*) and belief (*īmān*).[61]

Here we see that Mughniyya, unlike Riḍā and Azad, uses the term "dīn" always in its reified sense. In other words, each Prophet brought from God his own religion which is different from one another in terms of rituals, laws, customs, and so forth. However, like Azad, he understands the word "islām" in the verse "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*" as the very essence of all religions brought by Prophets, although he never uses the notion of *waḥda al-dīn*. He cites several verses from the Qur'ān to the effect that each of the Prophets was characterized with *islām* (obedience and submission). He further argues that "The most explicit verse concerning an inclusive *islām* is Q.3:85: Whoever desires another religion than *islām*, it shall not be accepted of him; in the hereafter he shall be among the losers."[62]

Surprisingly, this is not what Mughniyya really says when explicating Q.3:85. On the contrary, his brief comment on this very verse conforms exactly to what medieval commentators understood of it as abrogating the overtly inclusive verse, namely, Q.2:62. Some people invoke this verse (2:62), he begins his discussion, to argue that there is no difference between being a Muslim or a Jew or a Christian as long as every one of them believes in God and the hereafter. Mughniyya faults this view for two reasons. The first reason concerns the actual purport of the verse and to whom it refers. For Mughniyya, the verse refers to the people of the previous religions prior to the advent of Muḥammad: those who died with belief and good deed. The second reason is the seeming contradiction between the appearance of the verse, which extends salvific promise to those Jews, Christians, and Sabeans, on the one hand, and the exclusive verse "Whoever desires another religion than *islām*, it shall not be accepted of him" (3:85). According

[61] Ibid., p. 27.
[62] Ibid., p. 28.

to Mughniyya, this latter verse "specifies the verse on Jews and Christians to mean believers before the time of Muḥammad. As for the one who believed in God and the hereafter, and did not believe in Muḥammad after his appointment as messenger to which his preaching reached him, his belief has been nothing (in the hereafter he shall be among the losers)."[63]

Here we can see the ambivalent position of Mughniyya in the sense that he ascribes to an inclusivist view regarding Q.3:19, but then becomes totally an exclusivist on Q.3:85. Certainly, his view of the latter verse represents one of the deepest expressions of orthodoxy (claims of "right opinion") voiced by modern Muslim reformers. Much has been discussed about the orthodox Muslim approach to 3:85 as having abrogated a number of ecumenical passages which have often been adduced as "proof-texts" in support of the idea of religious tolerance. Ayoub has shown us that orthodox Muslims, both medieval and modern, have understood the verse in the juristic sense as superseding all other religions.[64] Underlying this exegetical activity is the orthodox dogma that Islam is the only absolute truth. The hold of this exclusivist position is by no means easy to break down and, at least in his interpretation of Q.3:85, Mughniyya fails to weaken the hold of medieval authorities.

This issue becomes even more complicated when we examine how Mughniyya approaches the ecumenical verse of Q.2:62. He seems to be open to different interpretations of this verse when he says that "*mufassirūn* are divided into eight views two of which are the most authentic."[65] First, the meaning of the verse is that God is not concerned with confessional identities (*asmā'*) either as a Muslim or a Mu'min or a Jew or a Sabean or a Christian, as these outward displays bear no effect. What is important is the correct belief (*'aqīda ṣaḥīḥa*) and good

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[63] Ibid., p. 103.
[64] Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters: The House of 'Imran*, p. 241.
[65] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol.1, p. 118.

deed (*'amal ṣāliḥ*). Second, this verse addresses the fate of those people who lived righteously due to their pure belief in God, although they did not see the Prophet, such as Qays ibn Sa'ida, Zayd ibn 'Amr, Waraqa ibn Nawfal and other who were known as *ḥanif*s. This verse, according this view, responds to a question regarding their "fate," and declares that they were saved. Mughniyya argues that the verse can be expanded to include Jews, Sabeans and Christians who believed in God and the hereafter before the advent of Muḥammad.[66]

Mughniyya seems to lean to the second view, although his further explication of verbal repetition in the verse "those who believe (*inna al-ladhīna āmanū*)" and "whoever believe in God and the hereafter" (*man āmana bi-Allāhi wa al-yawm al-ākhir*) leads to a different impression. Of course, the problem of verbal repetition has been extensively studied by scholars.[67] There are four ways prevalent among scholars to solve this problem. Ṭabarī and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī offer two solutions, one of which is to insert the sense of "among them" (*minhum*). Thus, the opening verse, "Truly those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians," is completed by the phrase "whoever *among them* believes." Another solution distinguishes the "believing" of a believer from that of Jew, Christian, and Sabean. While for the former, "whoever believes" suggests steadiness and perseverance in belief, for the latter, "whoever believes" means the assumption of belief in Muḥammad and what he brought.[68] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī suggests that the phrase "those who believe" either refers to those who believed before Muḥammad, or hypocrites. In that sense, "whoever believes" specifies those who rightly believe

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[66] Ibid., pp. 118-119.
[67] For a good discussion of this issue, see Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* pp. 98-105; Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters,* vol.1, p. 112.
[68] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān,* Mahmud Muhammad Shakir (ed.) (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1954), pp. 148-149; al-Tūsi, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Najaf: al-Maktaba al-'ilmiyya, 1957), vol.1, p. 285.

in Muḥammad.[69] The modern exegete Rashīd Riḍā argues that "whoever believes" functions not as a repetition of "those who believe", but as a specification of the three groups mentioned, namely, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans.[70] On his part, Mughniyya agrees with Riḍā's view, saying that:

> If we understand the phrase ["whoever believes in God and the hereafter"] as referring to the three groups, namely, the Jews, the Sabeans, and the Christians, then the problem is resolved. The verse then means as follows: Truly those who believe in God apart from the Jews, the Sabeans, and the Christians there should be no fear for them, and likewise whoever believes among the three groups there should be no fear for them as well. Thus, the judgment for all of them is one.[71]

This apparently inclusive understanding of non-Muslims seems to be in agreement with his general approach to the possible reward of unbelievers for their good deeds. In his commentary on the fate of unbelievers mentioned in Q.3.176-178, in a section called "the unbeliever and good deed" (*al-kāfir wa ʻamal al-khayr*), Mughniyya discusses a question posed by an interlocutor: Is the unbeliever rewarded if he does a good deed for others? He responds to it by saying that "God is just and within His justice that the one who does good and the other who does evil are not the same in the eyes of God."[72] He argues that while unbeliever will be punished for his unbelief, he also deserves a reward for his good deed. Yet, no one knows what kind of reward

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[69] Al-Rāziī *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʻa al-bahiyya al-misriyya, 1935), vol. 3, pp. 104-105.
[70] See also Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 335.
[71] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsir al-kāshif,* vol. 1, p. 118.
[72] However, before making this statement, Mughniyya identifies four issues concerning the relation between belief and good deeds. First, one who has faith and performs good deed; he is included in "Those who have said, 'Our Lord is God.' then have gone straight, upon them the angels descend, saying, 'Fear not, neither sorrow; rejoice in Paradise that you were promised" (Q.41:30). Second, one who has no faith and does not do good deed; he is among "Satan has gained the mastery over them, and caused them to forget God's Remembrance. Those are Satan's party; why, Satan's party, surely, they are the losers!" (Q.58:19). Third, one who has faith but does not do good deeds; he is among the second group mentioned earlier. If he mixes between good and evil deeds, he is among "the others who have confessed their sins; they have mixed a righteous deed with another evil. It may be that God will turn towards them; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate" (Q.9:102). Fourth, one who does good deed but has no faith, such as an unbeliever who feeds the poor and so forth. Mughniyya rejects the view that for this person his deed or no deed makes no difference based on "God accepts only of the godfearing" (Q.5:27). This verse means that God does not accept anything but a sincere deed which is purified from any worldly defect. See Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 2, pp. 211-212.

the unbeliever would receive nor when and where. Is the reward in this world or in the hereafter? He argues that this question must be trusted to the knowledge of God and His wisdom. Referring to the statement by the Shī'ī imām Mūsā Kāẓim (d.183/799) that reward is for whoever does good even if he does not intend it for the sake of God, Mughniyya argues that "it is preferable that God would reward the doer if he does it for good intention (*wajh al-khayr*) and humanity (*insāniyya*). It has been stated earlier that the reason (*'aql*) rejects the notion that God would reward the sinner, and rejects more strongly the view that God would punish the one who does not deserve punishment."[73]

On the basis of the above discussion, it is difficult to understand why Mughniyya views Q.3:85 as having abrogated 2:62. Perhaps, the temptation of medieval theology was too hard to resist. Another Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī from Iran proposes a complex interpretation of Q.2:62, 3:19 and 85. From his *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* we can see that Ṭabaṭabā'ī is very much engaged in both modern scholarship and medieval sources. Unlike Azad and Mughniyya, he often cites and annotates relevant excerpts from *ḥadīth* collections and from previous commentaries under a specific section called "*baḥth riwā'ī*" (discussion of transmitted materials). Arguably, his *tafsīr* reflects a dynamic engagement of the learned scholar who was fully convinced of the fact that the modern situation demanded the presentation of Islam in its universalistic aspect. He argues clearly that "at the gate of bliss no importance will be attached to names and titles, e.g., whether a group is called *the believer* or a faction *those who are Jews* or a party *Sabeans* or others *the Christians.* The only important thing is belief in God and the Last Day and doing good."[74]

[73] Ibid. See also Mughniyya, *Āyāt al-ḥurriya: Dimuqrātiyya al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Jawād, 2004), pp. 118-119.
[74] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-a'lāmi lil-maṭbū'āt, 1980) vol. 6, p. 67.

Like the three reformist *mufassirūn* discussed above, Ṭabaṭabā'ī understands "islām" not in its reified sense, but rather in its generic sense: submission. It is the *dīn* which God revealed to all Prophets throughout the ages. He acknowledges some differences in the *sharī'a*s of Prophets, but the essence is one, that is, submission and obedience to God in the way all of the Prophets had delivered. "The differences among these *sharī'a*s in perfection and deficiency," he asserts, "do not imply contradiction or exclusion, or superiority of one over the others. They are all one in that they are manifestations of submission and obedience to God in all that He demanded from His servants, as conveyed by His Prophets."[75] Ṭabaṭabā'ī then concludes: "It is clear from the preceding that what is intended is that the true faith, which is with God and in His presence, is one sacred law (*sharī'a*) that differs only in the degree [of comprehensiveness and perfection] in accordance with the different capacities of the different communities. In essence, however, it is one, one in the form which God has implanted it in humankind in their original state (*fiṭra*) of pure faith."[76]

However, in the section "*baḥth riwā'ī*," Ṭabaṭabā'ī cites several reports which clearly demonstrate his being entrapped into the shadow of sectarianism. One of such reports is attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d.113/731), the great-grandson of the Prophet, who says "*inna al-dīn 'inda Allah al-islām*" means submission to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib on [the matter of] guardianship (*wilāya*)."[77] Please note that, in the Shī'ī tradition, the transfer of *wilāya* from Muḥammad to 'Alī is generally believed to have been sanctioned by revelation.[78] Another quotation is attributed to 'Alī as follows: "I will define *al-islām* in such a way that nobody has

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[75] Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 120-121.
[76] Ibid., p. 121.
[77] Ibid., p. 126.
[78] For a detailed discussion on this, see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shī'īte Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

done before me, and nobody would define it [the way I did] after me. *Al-islām* is submission; submission is conviction; conviction is affirmation; affirmation is acknowledgment; acknowledgement is execution; execution is deed. A believer takes his religion from his Lord. Truly, the believer is he whose belief is known through his deed, and the unbeliever is he whose unbelief is known through his rejection."[79] In his comment on this report, Ṭabaṭabā'ī reverses his early explication of the word "*islām*," saying that "it is possible that *al-islām* is understood here in its confessional sense, that is, the religion brought by Muḥammad."[80]

Riḍā explicitly rejects such an understanding of the word *islām* in Q.3:19 and 85 as a confessional identity. He argues that the usage of *al-islām* to mean the doctrines (*'aqā'id*), traditions (*taqālīd*), and practices (*a'māl*) of those people who are known as Muslims, is a new terminology (*iṣṭilāḥ ḥādith*) based on the phenomenological principle of "religion is what its followers of a religion have (*al-dīn mā 'alayhi al-mutadayyinūn*)."[81] So, Buddhism is what the people have who are described as Buddhists and Judaism is what people have to whom the name Jew is applied and Christianity is what those people have who say "we are Christians", and so forth. According to Riḍā, this is *al-dīn* in the sense of an ethno-sociological community and ethnic identity (*jinsiyya*), and whether it (*jinsiyya*) has a revealed or a positivist origin (*aṣl samāwī aw waḍ'ī*), it undergoes change and alteration so that it is far from its sources in its regulations and its goals. Riḍā continues, "and the *dīn* of the People of the Book was transformed into a *jinsiyya* in this sense: it is which prevented the People of the Book from following the Prophet in what he brought of the explanation of the spirit of *dīn* of God which all the Prophets

[79] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* vol.3, p. 126.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 3, p. 360.

had along with the variations of their laws in application, and this is *al-islām*."[82] Thus, he concludes, "*al-islām* which the Qur'ān mentions as the *dīn* of God is not that which has generally been understood today in the sense of confessional identity or custom (*'urfī*)."[83]

This view was put forth by Riḍā when explicating Q.3:85, which bears a significant weight because the verse has often been understood by Muslims as having superseded the other seemingly ecumenical verses. Why should we understand *al-islām* in Q.3:85 not in its reified sense? For Riḍā, such an understanding of *al-islām* has something to do with the conception of *al-dīn* which the Qur'ān envisions. "Because al-*dīn*, if it is not the *islām* the meaning of which we have expounded earlier, is nothing but formalities (*rusūm*) and imitative traditions (*taqālīd*) which people adopt as a bond for ethnic identity (*jinsiyya*), and an instrument of partisanship, and a means of worldly gain. And that is the kind of thing that increases the hearts in corruption and the spirits in evil, for in this world the people are increased only in hostility, and in the hereafter only in hopelessness…."[84]

Riḍā's critical remarks of *al-islām al-jinsī* could lead one to conclude that he disapproves of the reality of religious diversity. However, a close reading of his *tafsīr* reveals that his primary concern is not that there are diverse religious systems, but rather the tendency of the people of different religions to quarrel with one another due to their differences. Riḍā admits that *jinsiyya* needs not disassociate *al-dīn* from its fundamentals, or what he calls its revealed origin. He says, in his own words, "If it (*al-islām*) was taken up in accord with its original nature, and there followed thereby as a consequence the identity link (*rābiṭa jinsiyya*), then that link would be only for good for its people, without being harmful to others, because of its being based on the rules

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., p. 358.

of justice and virtue and human mercy. But making *al-jinsiyya* the basis is corrosive of religion which is the repository of the happiness of this world and the next."[85] We learn from this passage that what really concerns Riḍā, like ʻAbduh and other Muslim reformers, is the renewal of personal communication or relationship with God which has been for a while corrupted by external differences of religious doctrines and pervasive *taqlīd* (uncritical acceptance) transmitted from generation to generation. In the case of the Qur'ānic *islām* he makes it clear that its essential meaning is the spirit of the *dīn* of God brought by all Prophets. This, as he has said frequently, is the *dīn* acceptable to God.

Most of Riḍā's views of *islām*, *dīn* and *jinsiyya* were adopted by the Indonesian Muslim reformer Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, known as Hamka. In his *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Hamka reiterates several points raised by Riḍā in his *al-Manār*. It is fair to say that, at least on the verses under study, a significant portion of Hamka's *tafsīr* is taken from, and often times is literally a translation of, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, which indicates that Riḍā's work has been one of the primary sources for his exegesis. Hamka himself admitted his indebtedness to *Tafsīr al-Manār* and other modern *tafsīr*s.[86] "The *tafsīr* that attracted my attention as a model for my *tafsīr,* "Hamka asserts, "is *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Rashīd Riḍā, who based his *tafsīr* on the methodology propounded by his teacher, Shaykh Muḥammad ʻAbduh. This *tafsīr* not only deals with religious issues such as *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* or history, but also elucidates the Qur'ānic verses through political and social developments facing the Muslims in the modern time."[87] Nevertheless, after a careful comparison between his *tafsīr* and *al-Manār* on two verses discussed above (Q.3:19 and 85), I

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[85] Ibid., p. 361.
[86] See Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pembimbing Massa, 1967), vol. 1, p.
[87] Ibid., p. 36. See also Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar: Qur'ānic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change* (PhD Dissertation, Temple University, 1997), p. 176.

can say with great confidence that Hamka's indebtedness to *al-Manār* is more than what scholars generally assume. Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, for instance, in his PhD dissertation on Hamka's *Tafsīr al-Azhar* lists *Tafsīr al-Manār* among a dozen other *tafsīr*s that have been consulted by Hamka in the course of writing his *tafsīr,* without further scrutinizing how he really utilizes them.[88]

In his discussion of Q.3:19, Hamka presents his understanding *al-dīn* and *al-islām* in a way similar to that of Riḍā, although in a summarized form. He emphasizes the point that "religion brought by all Prophets from Adam through Muḥammad, including Moses and Jesus, is no other than Islam. They called mankind to Islam, which is submission and obedience to God, and believing in Him alone."[89] Hamka then discusses why God prescribed religion for mankind. Here he translates literally two points that Riḍā discusses in his *al-Manār*: "The first is the purification of the souls and liberation of the intellects from taints of conviction in the hidden power of creatures and their control over the action of existing things, in order to surrender to and worship God. The second is improvement of the hearts by excellence of the intention in all deeds and purification of the intention toward God. That is what the word "islām" is all about."[90]

Several points raised by Hamka in relation to Q.3:85 also echo Riḍā's discussion of the verse, including the distinction between *al-islām al-dīnī* and *al-islām al-jinsī*. It has been known, he says, that in this world there is a community called "Muslim community" (*ummat Islam*). This

[88] Here are the primary sources of Hamka's *tafsīr*: *Jāmi' al-bayān* by al-Ṭabarī (d.923); *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* by al-Razī (d.1209); *al-Jami' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurtubī (d.1273); *al-Kashshaf* by al-Zamakhshari (d.1144); *Madārik al-tanzīl* by al-Nasafī (d.1245); *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr (d.1373); *Lubāb al-ta'wil* by al-Khazin (d.1373); *Tafsīr al-Manār* by 'Abduh (d.1905) and Riḍā (d.1935); *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir* by Tantāwī (d.1939); *al-Mīzān* by Ṭabaṭabā'ī (d.1981); *Tafsīr fi Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayid Qutb (d.1966); *Tafsīr al-furqān* by Ahmad Hasan (d.1958); and *Al-Qur'ān and Terjemahannya* by Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Republic of Indonesia. See Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, p. ix. See also Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar: Qur'ānic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change*, p. 174-175.
[89] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol.1, p. 135. This word "Islam" is written with capital "I" as Hamka himself used it.
[90] Ibid. This might be compared with *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 3, p. 257-258.

community is like "container" (*wadah*) which must be filled in with the true Islam. Their belief that they are Muslims could be instrumental to instill the spirit of Islam to their souls. For, if they adhere to Islam only as an identity, then they will be entrapped in an aphorism "religion is what its followers of a religion have."[91] He gives examples of Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity, as also mentioned by Riḍā. He then concludes: "Based on this, we can say that Islam as a religious teaching brought by the Prophet Muḥammad is a continuation from the previous Prophets, and it is not the possession of a specific nation or group, rather it is [intended] for mankind in all places and times."[92]

What I want to demonstrate here is the close affinity between *Tafsīr al-Azhar* and *Tafsīr al-Manār,* a point that has not been addressed by scholars who studied Hamka's work. I must point out, however, that this does not mean that there is nothing original in Hamka's *tafsīr.* Even a cursory reading of his *tafsīr* would reveal the indigenous values and elements in Hamka's *tafsīr*, which reflects his genuine engagement with both texts and local contexts. In his *tafsīr*, Hamka not only addresses current issues of the day but also uses local issues and examples to elucidate the verse of the Qur'ān. It is not an exaggeration to say that *Tafsīr al-Azhar* illustrates well the principle of flexibility of approach in hermeneutics while maintaining loyalty to the tradition. Like other Muslim reformers, Hamka was concerned primarily with how to reform people's religious life. Thus, after discussing two purposes of the prescription of religion which he adopted from *al-Manār,* Hamka addresses succinctly the very issue of the day, known as "Islam KTP" (Islam in ID card). He asserts that one may call himself a Muslim, born to a

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[91] Ibid., p. 232. Compare with *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol.3, p. 360.

[92] Ibid. I would argue, however, that Riḍā's concern is not about the universality of reified Islam brought by the Prophet, but rather the necessity of non-reified *islām* as the basis of *al-islām al-jinsī*. Thus in his concluding sentence he makes it clear that it is because *al-jinsiyya* is made the basis of *dīn*, that its people become so involved in the religion of a particular group and place. As a result, that *dīn* in its basic sense of that in which one finds the joy of this world and the next is destroyed.

Muslim family, living in a Muslim country, but that identification bears no effect if his heart and intellect are not purified from the taint of influences other than God, and if his submission is to his teacher, rather than God; he blindly follows (*taqlīd*) his teacher.[93]

Like other reformist exegetes discussed above, except the ambiguous position of Mughniyya, Hamka strongly rejects the common assumption that Q.3:85 has abrogated 2:62. His argument is two-fold. First, the meaning of *islām* in Q.3:85 is an inclusive *islām,* which is the religion of all Prophets. Even if one accepts the exclusive meaning of *islām,* this verse does not abrogate verse 62 because the real meaning of Islam contains submission to God, faith in the hereafter, and the performance of good deed. Second, similarly, verse 62 preaches the idea of inclusivity and not exclusivity. Hamka further argues that "if it is stated that Q.2:62 has been abrogated by verse 85 of sūra Āl ʻImrān, that would encourage fanaticism -- claiming for themselves an Islam even though they never practice it, and claiming the paradise only for themselves. However, if we understand the two verses as supporting one another, then the gate of *da'wa* (preaching) is always open, and the status of Islam as a religion of purity (*agama fitrah*) can be maintained."[94] The verse, therefore, complements Q.3:85. Hamka also claims that he has been searching for the interpretation of this verse (2:62) for a while, but nothing has satisfied him until he found the report by Ibn Abī Ḥātim on the authority of Salmān al-Fārisī as follows:

> [Salmān al-Fārisī] said: I have asked the Prophet concerning the fate of the people of other religions whom I met [before I was converted to Islam]. I explained to him the way they prayed and performed their rituals. Then I asked the Prophet which one was the true [way of performing rituals]. He responded to my question with the verse "Truly those who believe and the Jews…" and so on.[95]

[93] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* vol. 3, p. 135.
[94] Ibid., vol.1, p. 187.
[95] Ibid., p. 186.

What is significant is not only the way Hamka retells this report, which is different from that of classical exegetes like al-Ṭabarī,[96] but also the lessons he draws from it. For him, "the difference in ways of praying and performing rituals is acceptable among different religious communities, as the *sharī'a*s might differ because of different times. However, human beings should not be static without acquiring a deeper knowledge. They should continue studying until they find the truth, which is submission and obedience to God."[97] There are two themes which he emphasizes throughout his explication of this verse. The first is the necessity of the authentic belief and righteous deed for salvation. No matter what religion one ascribes to, without belief and good deed there would be no salvation. Hamka seems to be so concerned with the fact that "people claim with their mouth 'I am a Muslim' or 'I am a Jew' or 'I am a Christian' or 'I am a Sabean,' but never practice their belief. What will happen then is the tension and conflict, because religion becomes a groupism, not an inclusive truth."[98] The second theme is the consequence of the lack of belief and good deed, that is, fanaticism. Some people are such fanatical, he argues, "that they exchange their belief for jealousy: Those who do not believe in the same religion as ours are considered as our enemies. Others become aggressive, attacking, insulting, and propagating

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[96] Ṭabarī narrates on the authority of al-Suddī that the verse was revealed in reference to Salmān al-Fārisī and his companions. Salmān, we are told, was originally from Jundishapur, a famous Persian city of learning. The report by al-Suddī provides a detailed account of Salmān's conversion to Islam. He was a close friend of the son of the king of the city, but later on he parted from the king's son and joined a community of monks (*ruhbān*), distinguishing himself by the severity of his ascetic practices. He went to Jerusalem where he met with some learned men and grew sad as he came to realize that Prophetic marvels were events of the past. To consult him the leader related that a Prophet was soon to arise in the land of the Arabs, wearing the sign of prophecy. Returning from Jerusalem Salmān was captured and sold into slavery. While tending sheep for his owner he heard that a Prophet had arrived in Medina. Salmān rushed to that city where he encountered the Prophet and recognized him by the signs his former leader has revealed to him. When Salmān described to the Prophet the prayerful community in which he used to live, the Prophet responded by saying: "They are among the people destined for Hell (*ahl al-nār*)." Salmān became very sad and said: "Had they known about you, they would have believed in you and followed you." And God revealed this verse. Ṭabarī also narrates on the authority of Mujāhid that the Prophet said to Salmān: "This verse was revealed concerning your companions," and said further, "Whoever dies in the religion of Jesus and dies in submission to God before hearing me will be fine, but whoever hears me today and does not believe in me is already doomed." See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān,* vol. 2, pp. 150-155.

[97] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* vol.1, p. 186.

[98] Ibid., p. 183.

negative images of other religions."[99] Hamka strongly believes that religious fanaticism can be overcome by turning to the primordial faith and good deeds.

In this context it is difficult to accept Wan Yusof's contention that when dealing with "religious beliefs and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), Hamka was inclined to polemicize on religious differences in his effort to affirm the validity of Islamic faith, but not to the extent of rejecting other religions."[100] In my reading, Wan Yusof fails to substantiate his hypothesis. His discussion of Hamka's approach to "war verses" such as al-Mumtaḥina: 7-9 does not support his main contention mentioned above. Let me quote Wan Yusof's own words:

> Commenting on these verses, Hamka argues that Muslims must cultivate respect and friendship with those who are kind and just to them. On the contrary, they are commanded to fight in self-defense against those who establish a clear animosity against them. Hamka takes these verses as the bases for religious tolerance, for co-existing in one nation.[101]

Even on the most overtly "sword" verses such as Q.9:29, Hamka attempts to limit its applicability. This verse, which seems to commands an unconditional fight against non-believers, reads: "Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden -- such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the book -- until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled."[102] According to Hamka, this verse makes no sense in light of the good relationship between Muslim and Christian communities that was acknowledged by the Qur'ān. Therefore, it must be understood in the context of its occasion of revelation. In short, for Hamka, "the command to

[99] Ibid., p. 184.
[100] Wan Yusof, *Hamka's Tafsīr al-Azhar: Qur'ānic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change,* p. 183.
[101] Ibid., p. 184.
[102] This verse will be discussed extensively in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

fight the People of the Book is not due to ideological differences, but to the threat they pose to the Muslims."[103]

The question remains: In what sense can Hamka's interpretation be seen as polemical? Perhaps, Wan Yusof has been driven by his hypothesis about the role of *tafsīr* as a mirror of social change. Thus, since Hamka lived in such a polemical environment, polemical views must have also been reflected in his *tafsīr*. On the basis of the above discussion, this hypothesis must be reformulated. In his later article, Wan Yusof admits that "Analyzing the relevant verses of the Qur'an as interpreted by Hamka, gives an insight into his idea of religious unity and his promotion of inter-religious dialogue in order to promote peace and harmony in Indonesia in particular and the world in general."[104] I would argue that, although he lived in such a polemical environment, Hamka strived to interpret the Qur'ān differently for non-polemical interactions among diverse religious communities. In his discussion of Q.2:62, Hamka envisions the potential role of religion for peaceful co-existence among different religious communities in the modern world. "When human greed and desire in the modern era have caused wars and weapons of mass destruction," he declares, "the people of religion (*kaum agama*) should work together to create peace through a [common] basic belief in God and the hereafter, and probe it with good deeds, not destructive ones."[105] Hamka's more explicit statement about the unity of religion can be seen as follows:

> The human community in reality is one community. Likewise, religions in actuality are one; the core (*inti*) of religion is one. The contents of the message of all Prophets have not changed though change took place in language. The shari'a and its way of application can be different because of the changes of time and space. Nevertheless, the essence

[103] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* vol. 10, p. 79.
[104] Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, "Religious Harmony and Inter-Faith Dialogue in the Writings of Hamka," *Intellectual Discourse* 13/2 (2005), p. 113.
[105] Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar,* vol. 1, p. 184.

(*intisari*) of the real intention of religion is only one, the recognition of the oneness of God.[106]

Up to this point, it seems clear that all the six Muslim reformers whose *tafsīr*s become the object study of this dissertation reject the exclusivist understanding of the Qur'ānic *islām.* For these scholars, the Qur'ānic *islām* rather embraces all of those who submit to the will of God. They differ in their approach and emphasis, yet all agree that exclusivist understanding could only lead to fanaticism and tension among different religious communities. From a careful study of the Qur'ānic *islām* as expounded by Muslim reformers, it is evident that it has the potential to be freed from the gloss of medieval theology and the historically bound context of sectarian milieu of seventh-century Arabia. Although much of their emphasis is on defining *islām* in a universal manner which excludes a mere formal identification with a socio-historical Islam (*al-islām al-jinsī*), they also acknowledge the legitimacy of religious paths other than reified Islam.

Re-interpreting the Superiority of Islam

Thus far we have discussed reformist Muslim interpretation of Q.3:19 and 85. We now turn to Q.5:3, especially the middle part which says "This day the unbelievers have despaired of your religion; therefore do not fear them, but fear Me. This day I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My favor unto you, and I have approved Islam for your religion." This verse has raised many questions that have preoccupied Muslim scholars throughout the history of *tafsīr* the most important of which is the actual meaning of Islam being the perfect religion. Based on this verse, Muslims in general believe that Islam is the (or, perhaps, *the*) religion in the eyes of God who made it complete and gave it His approval. Muslims who take this verse literally tend to advocate the supremacist view of Islam over others, and, as Yohanan Friedmann

[106] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 342.

puts it, "It is therefore only natural that those who embrace it are superior to those who did not."[107]

When talking about its occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*), early Muslim commentators relate it to the testimony of the people of other faiths. They agree that the verse was revealed during the farewell pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-wadāʿ*) in the tenth year after the migration (*hijra*), but how do we know about the information of its occasion? Ṭabarī provides conflicting reports traceable to the Prophet's companions ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb (d. 24/644) and Ibn ʿAbbās. One report says that Jews told ʿUmar: "You are reading a verse that had it been revealed to us we would have chosen it a feast day." ʿUmar responded by claiming that he knew the verse was revealed on the day of ʿArafa (during pilgrimage). Another report says that it was a Christian who said: "O, people of Islam! A verse has been revealed to you. Had it been revealed to us, we would certainly have chosen the day of its revelation as a feast day: This day I have perfected your religion." Muslims seemed to be unaware of that until Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb said: "ʿUmar said that the verse was revealed to the Prophet while he was on the mountain at the day of ʿArafa. Indeed, we have chosen that day as a feast day for all Muslims." In other reports it was Ibn ʿAbbās who responded to a Jew or a person from the people of the book (*rajul min ahl al-kitāb*). Still other report tells us that it was Kaʿb who said: " Had the verse been revealed to the people of other faiths, they should have searched for the day of its revelation and chosen it as a feast day in which they come together." ʿUmar responded, "Which verse, O Kaʿb?" He said, "This day I have perfected your religion." ʿUmar then said: "I know the day when it was

[107] Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, p. 34.

revealed and the place where it was revealed. It was on Friḍay at 'Arafa. Praise be to God that both days are feast days for us."[108]

Rashīd Riḍā discusses these reports by tracing them to the books of *ḥadīth* collection. However, he does not make any judgment as to the authenticity of these reports. He does make a brief, yet significant, note on a Christian mentioned in the above report, who, according to Riḍā, was a secretary (*kātib*) of the *dīwān* of financial administration established by 'Umar.[109] This note is significant because in the later Muslim tradition 'Umar was usually portrayed as having prohibited the appointment of non-believers to public office.[110] One may wonder, why would a Christian or a Jew or a person from the People of the Book have said such a thing about the verse? Although different explanations can be given, non-believers' recognition was cited polemically to indicate the high status of the verse that even the People of the Book testify for the perfection of Islam. Riḍā discusses earlier Muslim interpretations of what the completion of religion means. For al-Ṭabarī, it means "purification of *al-bayt al-ḥarām* for them (Muslims) and getting rid of the polytheists from it so that the Muslims could perform the hajj without having mixed with the polytheists."[111] Riḍā also refers to al-Zamakhsharī who interprets the phrase "This day I have perfected your religion" to mean "I have protected you against your enemies

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[108] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 9, pp. 524-528.
[109] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 6, p. 155.
[110] 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb is also reported to have opposed Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d.664) when the latter employed a Christian secretary. It is related that 'Umar was sitting in the mosque at Medina while Abū Mūsā was in front of him presenting the accounts for Isfahan – written in a fair hand and exactly reckoned, so that all who saw admired them. "Whose writing is this?" asked 'Umar. He said, "My secretary." When asked to bring his secretary, he replied: "He cannot come into the mosque" 'Umar said: "Is he unclean then?" He said: "No. He is a Christian" Then, 'Umar gave Abū Mūsā a slap on the thigh – so hard that he said he thought his thigh was broken – and said, "Have you not read the command of God: "O you who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends to one another?" (Q.5:51). Abū Mūsā then said: "This very hour I will dismiss him and give him leave to return to Iran." See Niẓām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings,* tr. Hubert Darke (London: Routledge, 1960), 164. For a detailed discussion of the appointment of non-Muslims to public office, see Mun'im Sirry, "The Public of *Dhimmī*s during the 'Abbāsid Times," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74/2 (2011): pp. 187-204.
[111] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 6, p. 155; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān,* vol. 9, p. 520.

and made upper hands for you."[112] This statement, according to Riḍā, has been repeated by other exegetes such as al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī, and Abū al-Su'ūd. Al-Bayḍāwī is cited by Riḍā to have said: "'This day I have perfected your religion' with protection and superiority over all religions."[113]

On his part, Riḍā rather discusses at length the view of Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d.790/1388) in a section entitled "the completion of religion by the Qur'ān" (*ikmāl al-dīn bi-al-Qur'ān*). The fact that his discussion of the verse is based on al-Shāṭibī's *muwāfaqāt* is interesting since the latter is not known as a *mufassir*, but rather as a *faqīh*. What Riḍā seems to imply, it seems to me, is that the verse is not about the superiority of Islam over other religions as the earlier *mufassirūn* claimed. Or, at the very least, he is not interested in that issue. He praises the *muwāfaqāt,* the like of which "has not been written concerning the sources of Islam (*uṣūl al-islām*) and its wisdom."[114] On the basis of Q.5:3 and other verses, al-Shāṭibī argues for the comprehensiveness of the Qur'ān in the sense that we can find in the Qur'ān the explanation of everything (*tibyānan li-kulli shay'in*). As this does not deal explicitly with the topic of this dissertation, we shall not analyze it here. In his concluding remarks, Riḍā says: "We are inclined to understand [the meaning of] the completion of religion in the sense of what Ibn 'Abbās and other scholars have said. That is, the meaning of *al-dīn* includes creeds (*'aqā'id*), laws (*ahkām*), ethics (*ādāb*) and

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[112] Ibid., p. 156. Cf. al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn al-ta'wīl wa wujūh al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Matba'a al-babi al-halabi, 1966), vol. 1, p.593.
[113] Ibid., p. 157. Cf. al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2006), vol. 1, p. 255.
[114] Ibid., p. 157.

rituals (*'ibādat*) which were explained in detail, whereas social interactions (*mu'āmalāt*) were only alluded to in general."[115]

From the above discussion we learn that Riḍā understands *al-dīn* and *al-islām* with a reified reference. There is not an easy explanation as to how he turns from his severe attack on *al-islām al-jinsī* in relation to Q.3:19 and 85 to totally embrace Islam as a conventional religion with a reference to Q.5:3. What seems clear is that he does not ascribe to a polemical explanation of the Qur'ānic *islām* as his emphasis is on its comprehensiveness, rather than its superiority over other religions. Other Muslim reformers also refer to this verse not in the context of its relation to other religions. They interpret it differently to prove certain points they make. Abul Kalam Azad, for instance, interprets it in a way consistent with his main idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn.* He relates it to Abraham's prayer to God to raise from his offspring a generation devoted to God in absolute submission to Him. "In this verse," he asserts, "the Qur'ān announces the final fulfillment of a divine promise. That is, that the favor asked of God, which is now fulfilled in as much as, a generation of his offspring, even as Abraham had yearned for, has now taken its rise. "[116] Azad gives an important reason why this verse should not be understood as implying a supremacist view of the Qur'ān on other religions. The completion of the favor of divine message, he argues, is made in connection with the subject of the permissible and impermissible food because among the people of the Prophet's time restrictions in matters of food and drink were so oppressively

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[115] Ibid., p. 166. Hamka does not provide a clear definition of what constitutes *'ibada* and *mu'amala.* However, it seems that two terms are used within the context of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which usually classifies human conducts as related to worship (*'ibada*) and relations between people (*mu'amala*).
[116] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol.2, p. 278.

strict. So, the aim of the verse is "to do away with unnatural obstacles to life and rid the human mind of every element of rabid superstition."[117]

Clearly, Riḍā and Azad have shown us how the verse can be interpreted differently according to different contexts and concerns. This point is even more evident in the *tafsīr* of two Shī'ī scholars, Mughniyya and Ṭabaṭabā'ī. Both use the verse to make a theological point concerning the divine designation of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib for the position of *imāma* (leadership) after the death of the Prophet. As is well-known, the problem of succession to the Prophet was the root of many of the most intractable conflicts that have subsequently plagued Islam, especially between Sunnī Islam and Shī'ī Islam. As Wilfred Madelung puts it, "No event in history has divided Islam more profoundly and durably than the succession to Muḥammad."[118] For Sunnīs, Abū Bakr, the first caliph, was the right successor since he was the most excellent of men among the Prophet's companions. For Shī'īs, it was 'Alī who had been appointed by the Prophet as his successor. The question arises: How does the verse (Q.5:3) fit into this debate?

Like Riḍā, Mughniyya begins his discussion of the verse in a section called "the perfection of religion and the completion of favor" (*ikmāl al-dīn wa-itmām al-ni'ma*). While Riḍā seems to be more nuanced in his discussion of the early *mufassirūn*'s approach to the question of the perfection of religion, Mughniyya makes a sweeping generalization as he distinguishes between Sunnī *tafsīr* and Shī'ī *tafsīr*. He asserts that the vast majority of Sunnī scholars are of the opinion that "the meaning of the verse is that God has perfected for Muslims their religion by making it victorious and superior over all other religions, in spite of the fact that

[117] Ibid., p. 280.
[118] Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

the adherents of other religion are against it and the Muslims."[119] For Shī'īs, on the other hand, the verse must be grasped by looking at the event (*ḥāditha*) on which it was revealed. Mughniyya asserts that both Sunnīs and Shī'īs agree on the point that the verse was revealed at the tenth year after *hijra*, the year when the Prophet performed his farewell pilgrimage. On the way back to Medina at a site called Ghadīr Khumm, the verse was revealed while the Prophet delivered a sermon as follows:

> Verily, God is my guardian (*mawlāya*) and I am the guardian of believers. I am preferred over them then themselves. So, whosoever I am his guardian, 'Alī is his guardian. (He said it three times, and in other reports, four times.) And he said: O God! Be friendly with the friends of 'Alī and enemy of the enemies of 'Alī. Whoever loves him, love; whoever hates him, hate him; whoever helps him, help him; whoever leaves him, leave him; and let the truth be with him wherever he is. Let those present here convey it to those who are absent.[120]

The difference between Sunnīs and Shī'īs, according to Mughniyya, is the way they understand the phrase "whosoever I am his guardian, 'Alī is his guardian" (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'alī mawlāhu*). Sunnī scholars understand the *wilāya* (guardianship) to mean "love and friendship," whereas Shī'īs take it as a clear proof of the divine designation for leadership. For, the same type of *wilāya* that has been established for Muḥammad should also be established for 'Alī, namely, religious and worldly authority. On the basis of the above discussion, Mughniyya concludes that "the meaning of the verse is that on that day God has perfected the religion by a textual designation of 'Alī for the caliphate."[121]

One can notice that Mughniyya is certainly polemical but not against non-Muslims but rather against his co-religionists, i.e. the Sunnīs. Such a polemical statement is difficult to avoid, because to explain Shī'īsm and the causes for its coming into being is to fall immediately into

[119] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 3, p. 13.
[120] Ibid., p. 14.
[121] Ibid.

polemics with Sunnī Islam. Sometimes Mughniyya uses a dialectic method in the form of "you ask, we respond" in his polemics with what he calls "Sunnīs' understanding of the completion of religion." Sunnī scholars might argue that the perfection of religion by making it superior over other religions and by explaining its laws sufficiently has been obvious and needs no explanation, whereas the perfection of religion by a textual designation of ʻAlī for the caliphate has to be proved and explained. How do the Shīʻīs prove it? According to Mughniyya, the Shīʻīs would respond by saying that "the real perfection is not complete except with the existence of the legislative and executive authority altogether (*al-sulṭa al-tashrīʻiyya wa al-tanfīdhiyya maʻan*). The former could not stand without being supported by the latter. During the Prophet's life time, the executive power was at his hand, and the enemies of Islam thought that the executive authority would be diminished by his death, which also would lead to the disappearance of Islam. But the Prophet appointed ʻAlī to preserve the *sharīʻa* after his departure."[122]

In a similar vein, Ṭabaṭabā'ī problematizes various interpretations of Q.5:3 which have been discussed by earlier *mufassirūn* in favor of its association with the event of Ghadīr Khumm. Central to his discussion is the context of its revelation and its assertion of the perfection of religion and completion of divine favor. He attempts to reconcile two different views of when the verse was revealed. For Ṭabaṭabā'ī, this investigation is necessary in order to understand precisely what the perfection of religion means. He cites extensively various reports from both Shīʻī and Sunnī sources to the effect that the verse was revealed on the day of Ghadīr Khumm's event. Ṭabaṭabā'ī claims that that verse was revealed on the question of *wilāya* is supported by more than twenty traditions, fifteen of which are connected with the event of Ghadīr Khum.[123]

[122] Ibid., p. 15.
[123] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* vol. 5, p. 196.

One of such reports is on the authority of Sa‘īd al-Khudrī that the Prophet in Ghadīr Khum invited people to ‘Alī and took his arms and lifted it so high that the white spot in the armpit of the Prophet could be seen. Then the verse was revealed: "This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have approved Islam for your religion." The Prophet then said: "God is great (*Allāhu akbar*) that religion has become perfected and that God's favor has been completed, His pleasure with my mission and with the *wilāya* of ‘Alī have been achieved." Then he added: "O God! Be friendly with the friends of ‘Alī and the enemy of his enemies. Whoever helps him, help him, and whoever leaves him, leave him."[124]

In Ṭabaṭabā'ī's framework, the verse can be understood as follows. The phrases "This day the unbelievers have despaired of your religion" and "Today I have perfected your religion for you" mean that those who did everything possible to destroy Islam, when they lost all hope of achieving this end, were left with only one hope. They thought that since the guardian/protector of Islam was the Prophet, after his death Islam would be left without a guide and leader and would thus definitely perish. But in Ghadīr Khum their wishes were brought to nought and the Prophet presented ‘Alī as the guide and leader to the people. Thus, what is meant by "God's favor" in the verse is the *wilāya*, which is the administration of religious affairs according to the

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[124] Ibid., p. 193. According to Ṭabaṭabā'ī, the two conflicting reports cited above can be reconciled as follows. First of all, he strongly believes that there is no question that the verse was about the *wilāya* of ‘Alī. He also admits, however, that extensive research would support the view that the verse was revealed on the day of ‘Arafa. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Q.5:3 and other verses concerning the question of *wilāya* were all revealed before the day of Ghadīr Khumm, but the Prophet decided to defer the message until the day of Ghadīr Khumm. "The Prophet might think that revealing the message could lead people to reject him (‘Alī) or cause him in danger, so that it would be better to inform them later until he was asked to convey the message: 'O the Prophet, convey all that has been sent down to you from your Lord'" (Q.5:67). In short, for Ṭabaṭabā'ī, the two reports are not negating each other. Ṭabaṭabā'ī cites the above report from *Ghāya al-marām* by Hashim ibn Sulayman Bahrani. Elsewhere he notes that Bahrani cites "six Sunnī and fifteen Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*s concerning the occasion and reason for the revelation of this verse." See Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *Shī‘īte Islam,* trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 218.

divine message. After ‘Alī, Ṭabaṭabā’ī continues, this heavy and necessary duty of guide and leader was left upon the shoulders of family.[125]

While the context and meaning of the perfection of Islam may be debatable, Muslim reformers agree that the verse is not about the superiority of Islam over other religions as has been assumed by medieval Qur’ān commentators. The question of *wilāya* forms the major concern for Mughniyya and Ṭabaṭabā’ī. Both contend that the message about the completion of religion was an important event, and therefore it must not be related to a minor occasion such as the promulgation of one of the injunctions of religion. Rather, it was a matter of such importance that the continuation of Islam depended upon it, namely, the matter of leadership after the death of the Prophet.[126] This is, in fact, the very question that has been challenged by Sunnī scholars. That is, if the *wilāya* of ‘Alī is of an utmost important issue, why did the reports about it not reach the level of *mutawātir*.[127] Most Sunnī reformers overlook the connection of the completion of religion in the verse with the question of *wilāya*. Of the four Sunnī scholars whose *tafsir*s are examined in this study, only Qāsimī does mention the report about Q.5:3 as related to the *wilāya* of ‘Alī. However, he is quick to deny it by referring to the medieval Sunnī exegete Ibn Kathīr.[128] Another Sunnī reformer, Hamka, explicates the verse in a way that is more relevant to the Indonesian context, that is, the need to liberate the Muslims from an intellectual stagnation. No allusion to the *wilāya* has been made in his *tafsīr*.

Like other Muslim reformers, Hamka does not consider the verse as pointing to the claim of the superiority of Islam to all other religions. He does not even summarize the earlier

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[125] Ibid., p. 181.
[126] Ibid., p. 196-197. See also Ṭabaṭabā’ī, *Shī‘īte Islam,* p. 178-179.
[127] According to the Muslim tradition, *ḥadīth mutawātir* is a *ḥadīth* that has been reported by numerous transmitters in its level of transmission to such an extent that it would be absurd to suppose that all these transmitters concurred to report a falsehood.
[128] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta’wīl*, vol. p. 1834.

mufassirūn's approach to the verse as Riḍā does. He begins his discussion of this verse by referring to Q.3:19 and 85 discussed above to emphasize the point that *al-islām* develops gradually from a non-reified to reified form and becomes complete with the revelation of this verse. He asserts that "before it was revealed completely the believers were in the state of waiting. In this verse God announces that now He has satisfied (*riḍā*), because all Islamic laws and regulations have been completely revealed."[129] Yet Hamka distinguishes between the completion of religion in terms of rituals (*ibadat*) and social interactions (*mu'amalat*). In the case of the former, everything must be accepted wholly with no addition or omission, whereas in the latter we are given the freedom of thought (*kebebasan berpikir*) or *ijtihād*. Since the result of *ijtihād* is relative (*ẓannī*), it has always been opened to rethinking and revision throughout history.[130]

Interestingly, unlike Riḍā who emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the Qur'ān as an explanation of everything, Hamka explores another dimension of the Qur'ān that provides ample room for rethinking and reinterpretation. He argues that "on issues of human development, the perfection of Islam is evident in that it offers us the freedom of thought."[131] Furthermore, Hamka elaborates the fact that human thought is always influenced by the place and time in which he/she lives. From a sociological point of view, it is easy to notice that Muslims are different in their outlook from one country to another, and the Qur'ān recognizes the evolving need of society. "All of this teaches us how complete Islam has been revealed by God, because a complete religion is the one that recognizes the nature of human development and does not

[129] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 113.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

restrict it. What causes human thought to be stagnant is when the result of human thinking is no longer rethought and critically reassessed," he argues.[132]

The last sentence highlights Hamka's concern about the unconditional acceptance by Indonesian Muslims of the rigidity of Islamic law which has prevented them from exercising a new *ijtihād*. He gives several examples to show that law (*hukum*) might change because of the evolving demands of society. One of those examples is derived from his own experience as one of the leaders of the Muhammadiyah, the largest reformist Muslim organization in the country. We are told that before World War II the 'ulama of the Muhammadiyah argued for the use of a curtain to separate men and women in the public gathering. What is the basis of the segregation between men and women? Hamka argues that there is no textual basis since Q.33:53 specifically deals with the Prophet's wives: "when you ask any thing from them (the Prophet's wives), ask them from behind a curtain." The general ethical principle of public meeting is Q.24:30-31 in which men and women are required to lower their gaze and guard their modesty. Thus the 'ulama exercised *ijtihād* concerning the segregation, and their *ijtihād* was influenced by their specific context and time. Therefore, thirty years later, some 'ulama of the Muhammadiyah did not maintain the segregation any longer because of the changing nature of human development and need.[133]

In his concluding remarks, Hamka reiterates the meaning of the completion of religion. In the realm of rituals, the completion means that the basic teaching of worship has been completely revealed. In the meantime Islam is also complete because it provides the freedom of thought for mankind who have been given the faculty to exercise *ijtihād*. For Hamka, re-thinking and *ijtihād*

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[132] Ibid., p. 114.
[133] Ibid., pp. 115-116.

represent the dynamic spirit of Islam. Imam Shāfi'ī (d.204/820), he says, was known for having revised his old opinion (*qawl qadīm*) when he was in Iraq with a new opinion (*qawl jadīd*) because he encountered a new situation in Egypt. Then he says: "This indicates the perfection of Islam and human being exercises *ijtihād* using his intellect to get close to such a perfection as well by taking into consideration different places and times, raison d'être, and legal consequences."[134]

Concluding Remarks

Undoubtedly, the Qur'ān characterizes "*al-islām*" as the primordial religion preached by all Prophets who were called *muslimūn* in this meta-historical sense. Even the word "*al-dīn*" is never used in the Qur'ān in its plural form, *adyān*, which indicates that religious life at the time was not yet fully reified. However, in the course of time, such an inclusive characterization of the Qur'ānic *islām* gradually lost its popularity and significance in public and was eventually reduced to its being a proper name for the religion of Islam and dogmatized in the historical context. Thus, the dogmatic version of understanding Islam prevailed with its exclusivist interpretation in the history. In this framework, the salvation has been assigned only to a certain interpretation of orthodox Islam, and those who stayed outside of this group have been damned to hell. This chapter tries to demonstrate that some attempts have been made by reform-minded theologians to develop new understandings and re-interpretations of the Qur'ānic *islām* which fit with the need of pluralist society of the modern world.

The various issues that emerge from reformist Muslim interpretation of the three verses in the Qur'ān, namely Q.3:19, 85 and 5:3, and their relation to the seemingly ecumenical verses

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[134] Ibid., p. 117.

such as 2:62, reveal some complexities and difficulties that Muslim reformers face in dealing with, on the one hand, a certain level of ambiguity in the Qur'ān and, on the one hand, the conservative legacy of the past generations. These difficulties manifest differently in their *tafsīr.* For instance, in Riḍā's *tafsīr,* the Qur'ānic *islām* is understood back and forth in both reified and non-reified senses. He sometimes goes as far as to suggest that belief in the Prophet is not required for the people of other faiths to attain salvation. Yet, often times his language is not straightforward, which leads some scholars to suggest that Riḍā appears to "counterbalance his ideas on the validity of religious pluralism."[135] Such complexities and difficulties can also be seen in Mughniyya's seemingly contradictory accounts of the status of infidels (*kuffār*), including his view of the relationship between Q.3:85 and 2:62. For Ṭabaṭabā'ī and Hamka, the perfection of religion as envisioned in Q.5:3 means two totally different things, although both agree that the verse is not about the superiority of Islam over other religions. Abul Kalam Azad is, perhaps, the most consistent of all Muslim reformers examined in this study in proposing a personalist interpretation of the Qur'ānic *islām* as the intensely personal submission of the individual to God, which is shared by all peoples of different times and of different religious backgrounds.

At any rate, these Muslim reformers agree that the Qur'ānic *islām* is not the sole possession of Muslims who identify with the historical Islam. The notion of the superiority of Islam over other religions is also absent in their writings. Instead, they acknowledge the salvific promise to others. This study has shown that acknowledgement of the potential of others outside the house of reified Islam to respond to God, and the path of worshiping Him in their own ways,

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[135] Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberalism, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Inter-religious Solidarity against Oppression,* p. 171; Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of "Others",* p. 196.

is more widespread than is commonly supposed. I would agree with the Tunisian scholar Mohamed Ṭalbī who took ‘Abduh’s and Riḍā’s view seriously and argued that it is possible for Islam to elaborate a theology which would allow for a certain degree of plurality in the ways of salvation.[136] Furthermore, one may ask how the more explicit criticisms of other religions in the Qur’an have been interpreted by Muslim reformers, including the question of the falsification of previous scriptures, commonly known as *taḥrif*. In the next chapter, this issue of *taḥrif* will be dealt with in detail.

[136] Mohamed Talbi, “Islam and Dialogue: Some Reflections on a Certain Topic,” in Richard Rousseau S.J. (ed.) *Christianity and Islam: The Struggling Dialogue* (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1985), p. 63.

Chapter Three
THE FALSIFICATION OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

The Muslim charge that the scriptures of Jews and Christians have been falsified, corrupted, and altered has been widely discussed by scholars. As early as 1877, Moritz Steinschneider provided a detailed study of the falsification charge in the works of Ibn Ḥazm (d.456/1064), al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Taymiyya.[1] A year later, Ignaz Goldziher wrote that the question of scriptural falsification was "the central point (*Kernpunkt*) of Muslim polemic" – an essential key to tracing the development of theological polemics against the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*).[2] More recent studies show that Muslim scholars have made the accusation of scriptural falsification a major part of their polemics against Jews and Christians.[3] Camilla Adang, for instance, surveys a variety of Muslim approaches to the falsification of pre-Qur'ānic scriptures from Ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d.240/855) to Ibn Ḥazm, which include Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889), al-Ya'qūbī (d.292/905), al-Mas'ūdī (d.345/956), al-Maqdisī (d.355/966), al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1013) and al-

[1] Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockaus, 1877).

[2] Ignaz Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32 (1878), p. 363. Goldziher's study includes the works of al-Shahrastānī (d.548/1153), Abū al-'Abbās al-Sinhājī al-Qarafī (d.684/1285), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.751/1350), Ibn Khaldūn (d.808/1406), al-Maqrīzī (d.845/1442) and Hajjī Khalīfa (d.1067/1657).

[3] See, for instance, W. Montgomery Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," *Transactions* 16 (1957): pp. 50-62; Moshe Perlmann, "The Medieval Muslim Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in S.D. Goitein (ed.) *Religion in a Religious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), pp. 103-129; David S. Powers, "Reading/Misreading One Another's Scriptures: Ibn Hazm's Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahudi," in William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.) *Studies in Islamic ad Judaic Traditions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 109-121; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002): pp. 419-436.

Birūnī (d.440/1048).[4] Scholars have also demonstrated the persistence of the scriptural falsification charge among contemporary Muslims to the extent that, as Kate Zebiri notes, the doctrine of the falsification of previous scriptures is "virtually unchallenged."[5]

It is noteworthy that although scholars agree that the doctrine of the falsification of scriptures is rooted in the Qur'ān, there have been a few studies on how the Qur'ānic accusations have been interpreted by Muslim exegetes. Even Jane McAuliffe, a prominent scholar of *tafsīr*, when writing about Muslim Biblical scholarship, chooses to discuss the Qur'ānic accusation of scriptural falsification by looking at the Muslim polemical literature, rather than Qur'ān commentaries.[6] Perhaps, the most thorough study of Qur'ān commentaries on verses that charge Jews and Christians with deliberate or inadvertent corruption of their scriptures is that composed by Gordon Nickel. In his *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān*, Nickel discusses the development of the theme of scriptural falsification in two early Qur'ān commentaries written by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767) and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī.[7] The purpose of the present chapter is to describe and analyze reformist Muslim understandings of verses in the Qur'ān, which Muslim polemicists have used to support the Islamic accusation of scriptural falsification.

[4] Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scripture," in Jacques Waardenburg (ed.) *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 143-159.
[5] Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p. 50; see also M.Y.S. Haddad, *Arab Perspectives of Judaism: A Study of Image Formative in the Writings of Muslim Arab Authors 1948-1978* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984).
[6] Jane McAuliffe, "The Qur'ānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7:2 (1996): pp. 141-158.
[7] See Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). See also Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of Taḥrīf: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's Commentary on Key Qur'ānic Verses," in David Thomas (ed.) *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 207-223.

Scholars differ on what verses are pointing to the theme of falsification. Frants Buhl highlights verses containing *ḥarrafa* (2:75; 4:46; 5:13 and 5:41), *lawā* (3:78 and 4:46), and *baddala* (2:59 and 7:162).[8] A similar classification is given by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh.[9] John Wansbrough identifies "three concepts: *kitmān* (concealment, e.g. 534 *ad* Q. 2:42), *tabdīl* (substitution, e.g. 535 *ad* Q. 2:58), and *taḥrīf* (alteration, e.g. 536-7 *ad* Q. 2:75)."[10] John Burton classifies the relevant verses into two: *kitmān* (2:42; 2:140; 2:146; 2:159; 2:174; 3:71; 3:187; 4:37) and *taḥrīf* (2:75; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41).[11] Jane McAuliffe offers more inclusive classification, saying "The full Qur'ānic accusation must be culled from a broad range of verses assembled through the keyword search of six basic terms and their cognates, terms which carry such connotations as changing, substituting, concealing, confounding, twisting (the tongue) and forgetting (*taḥrīf*, *tabdīl*, *kitmān*, *labs*, *layy* and *nisyān*)."[12] In what follows we shall discuss three basic themes, namely distortion (*taḥrīf*), concealment (*kitmān*, *ikhfā'*) and twisting (*layy*), which are central to the Qur'ānic accusations of falsification. To anticipate my argument: modern Muslim discussions of scriptural falsification are more nuanced than what scholars generally assume, and the correlation between these three basic themes is not as straightforward as is sometimes supposed. It seems that modern Muslims' knowledge of other peoples' scriptures remains sketchy, and western historical criticism of the Bible might have contributed to that effect.

[8] Frants Buhl, "Taḥrīf," in M.Th. Houtsma et al. (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), vol. 4, pp. 618-619.
[9] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," in P.J. Bearman et al. (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), new edition, vol. 10, pp. 111-112.
[10] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 109.
[11] John Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* 4 (1992, publ. 1994): pp. 95-106.
[12] McAuliffe, "The Qur'ānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," p. 144.

The Charge of Scriptural Distortion

The Qur’ān contains a substantial amount of materials related to earlier scriptures. While some verses confirm the truth of earlier revelations, others accuse them of being falsified. The much discussed term concerning the Qur’ānic accusation of falsification is of course “*taḥrīf*,” which is the verbal noun of the verb “*ḥarrafa*.” The word is generally understood to mean “to distort” or “to alter.”[13] Scholars used to talk about two types of *taḥrīf*: *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* or *taḥrīf al-lafẓ* (*taḥrīf* in the actual text) and *taḥrīf al-ma‘nā* (*taḥrīf* in the meaning or interpretation). The former refers to the actual textual distortion and corruption, whereas the latter to the false and distorted interpretation of a reliable text.

The word “*yuḥarrifūna*” (they distort) occurs four times in the Qur’ān as follows:

> Q. 2:75: Are you then so eager that they should believe you, seeing there is a group of them that heard God’s word, and then distorted it (*yuḥarrifūnahū*), and that after they had comprehended it, wittingly?
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> Q. 4:46: Of those who are Jews (there are those who) distort the word from its places (*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihī*), and say, “We have heard and we disobey” and “hear, and may you not hear” and “Observe us,” twisting with their tongues and traducing religion. If they had said, “We have heard and obey” and “hear and regard us,” it would have been better for them, and more upright; but God has cursed them for their unbelief so they believe not except a few.
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> Q. 5:13: So for their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard, they distort the word from its places (*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihī*); and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of; and thou wilt never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them. Yet pardon them, and forgive; surely God loves the good-doers.
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> Q. 5:41: O Messenger, let those who vie with one another in unbelief not grieve you, such men as say with their mouths “we believe” but their hearts believe not; and the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to you, distorting the word from its places (*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima min ba‘d mawāḍi‘ihī*), saying, “If you are

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[13] Edward Lane gives the sense of *ḥarrafa* as “he altered.” See Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), Book I, Part 2, p. 550.

> given this, then take it; if you are not given it, beware!" Whomsoever God desires to try, they can not avail him anything with God.

The word "yuḥarrifūna" in these four verses is understood by the Syrian exegete Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī to mean that *taḥrīf* took place in the way both Jews and Christians interpreted their scriptures, whereas the text of the Bible is unquestionably reliable. To reinforce his view, he cites the medieval *mufassirūn*, notably Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Qāsimī points out that Ibn Kathīr glosses "*yuḥarrifūnahū*" with "they interpret it [God's word] differently from its proper meaning," whereas Ṭabarī maintains that "*yuḥarrifūnahū* means they change its meaning and interpretation and they alter it."[14] Before going further in the explication of the word, Qāsimī addresses an etymological issue of *taḥrīf,* saying that *taḥrīf* comes from "*inḥiraf al-shay' 'an jihatihī*" (deviation of a thing from its proper direction) which means "turning away from a right direction to another." Thus the Qur'ānic phrase "*yuḥarrifūnahū*" means that "they turn away from its proper meaning to another."[15]

Although Ibn Kathīr and Ṭabarī are two most quoted sources in his explication of the meaning of "*yuḥarrifūna*," Qāsimī also makes mention of other sources, including the polemical work entitled *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* written by the Indian Muslim polemist Shaykh Rahmatullah al-Kayrānawī al-Hindī (d.1890). Kayrānawī was especially known for his involvement in the public debate between him and the German missionary Carl G. Pfander (d. 1865) which took place in April 1854 in Agra, India. The subject of discussion at this public debate, which was lasted for two days, was mainly *taḥrīf*.[16] Subsequently, Kayrānawī wrote *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* as reaction to

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[14] Jamal al-Din al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Isa al-babi al-halabi, 1957), vol. 1, p. 166.
[15] Ibid.
[16] For a detailed analysis of this public debate and its environments, see Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993). See also Powell, "Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairānawī and Muslim-Christian Controversy in India in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20

Pfander's *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq.*[17] Written in Arabic in 1867, the book has been translated into Turkish (1877), French (1880), English (1900), Urdu (1968), and many other languages common to Pfander's *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq.*[18] The *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* is very influential on the Muslim thinking of the falsification of the Bible, especially on the Egyptian reformer Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā as will be discussed later. For the moment, it suffices to say that many scholars have attested to this. Christine Schirrmacher, for example, points to "Rashīd Riḍā's extensive use of the work when dealing with Christianity."[19] In a similar vein, Hugh Goddard detects the influence upon him of Kayrānawī's *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq.*[20]

In the case of Qāsimī, he refers to Kayrānawī's book but calls into question its dismissive assertion of the authenticity of Jewish and Christian scriptures. The latter provides a number of examples to show that the texts of the pre-Qur'ānic scriptures have been fully falsified and distorted. Qāsimī stands up against this dismissive claim, saying that "to claim the whole sacred Books have been falsified is too dismissive."[21] Interestingly, Qāsimī finds the support for his view even from the works of traditionalist Muslims, such as Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1449). In his commentary on al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ,* Ibn Ḥajar says that "the claim that the whole texts [of

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(1976): pp. 42-63. Christine Schirrmacher wrote her Ph.D. dissertation in German on this debate and was published under the title "Mit den Waffen des Gegners: Christlich-Muslimische Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert" (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1992). See also Schirrmacher, "The Agra Debates of 1854," *The Bulletin of the Henry Martin Institute of Islamic Studies* 13:1-2 (1994): pp. 74-84; Schirrmacher, "The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century," in Waardenburg (ed.) *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, pp. 270-279. For a critical assessment of Powell's and Schirrmacher's works, see Christian W. Troll, "New Light on Christian-Muslim Controversy of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," *Die Welt des Islams* 34-1 (1994): pp. 85-88.

[17] Karl Pfander composed *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq* in Persian and published in 1835. Numerous reprints and versions into other languages have since appeared, and it was thoroughly revised and enlarged by W. St. Clair Tisdall. See C.G. Pfander, D.D., *The Mizanul Haqq* (Balance of Truth), revised and enlarged by W. St. Clair Tisdall, M.A., D.D. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1911).

[18] The latest Arabic edition dates from 1978, and was authorized by the late shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd of al-Azhar. In 1989, a short English version was published by Ta-Ha publishers in London.

[19] Christine Schirrmacher, "The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century," p. 273.

[20] Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), p. 56.

[21] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 1, p. 178.

the Bible] have been altered (*buddilat*) is an exaggeration (*mukābara*).” He is reported by Qāsimī to have provided several testimonies from both the Qur’ān and the prophetic traditions to demonstrate that some of the Biblical contents have remained unaltered and unchanged, including the Qur’ānic assertion that the Bible contains a prophecy about the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad (Q.7:157). There are also traditions suggesting the stoning punishment in the Bible, which indicate its reliability.[22]

In his interpretation of Q.4:46, Qāsimī extends his sources beyond Ibn Kathīr and Ṭabarī to include Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim (d.751/1350). With this reference to various sources, Qāsimī’s discussion of the falsification of previous scriptures seems to be more nuanced. Rāzī offers a brief review of the Muslim scholarship on the nature of *taḥrīf*. Rāzī asserts that *taḥrīf* could take place in three ways. First, the People of the Book altered the word of the Bible with another word. Second, they manipulated and interpreted the Bible wrongly and turned the word from its correct meaning to the wrong one. This is a similar to the way Muslim innovators (*ahl al-bid‘a*) did with the Qur’ānic passages to support their views. Rāzī contends that “this is the meaning of *taḥrīf* in the Qur’ān.” Third, the *taḥrīf* verses refer to a specific event taking place at the time of the Prophet, namely when the People of the Book met the Prophet and asked a question related to their matter, but later on they distorted his statement.[23]

[22] Ibid., pp. 168-169.
[23] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 1276.

Is the present Torah[24] which is at the hands of the Jews reliable? To answer this question, Qāsimī refers to Ibn Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya. The former argues that scholars are divided into three groups. Some believe that the whole Torah has been altered; some contend that the present Torah has no "sacred" status at all; and there are others who argue that *taḥrīf* took place only in its interpretation, while the text is still reliable. Qāsimī refers to the Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya who discusses two extreme positions with regard to the Muslim scholarship on the *taḥrīf*. On the one hand, some Muslims argue that no reliable text of the Bible exists today. On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that the alteration of the text of the Bible is impossible because the Qur'ān affirms its reliability by asking "Say: Bring the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful" (Q.3:93). According to Qāsimī, the Shaykh al-Islām's position is that "the corruption which occurred was only slight, and the greater part of the earlier scriptures was not corrupted."[25] In Ibn Taymiyya's own words: "What we have presented shows that Muslims do not claim that every copy in the world of the Torah, Gospel, and Psalms in every language since the time of Muhammad has undergone verbal change. I do not know even one of the *salaf* who claimed that."[26] Apparently, Qāsimī agrees with this view.

The Indian Muslim reformer Abul Kalam Azad agrees with the view that *taḥrīf* took place in the realm of interpretation, not the Biblical text itself. For him, the problem with Jews is not about the unreliability of their scripture, but rather "Their basic weakness lies in the fact that they had ceased to possess a correct knowledge of their scripture and had ceased to act

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[24] Muslims often refer to the Jewish scripture with the word "tawrā" (Torah) as the Qur'ān does too. It seems clear that when they use the word "Torah" they mean the whole Hebrew Bible, not just a part of it. Even within the Jewish tradition, the term "Torah" is sometimes applied to the entire Hebrew Bible.
[25] Ibid., p. 1277.
[26] See Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-saḥīḥ* (New York: Caravan Books, 1984), p. 229.

righteously in consonance therewith."[27] When dealing with the notion of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'ān, Azad does not see this as relating to the actual textual corruption of the Bible. In his commentary on Q. 5:13, for instance, he asserts that some of the Jewish priests tried to exploit the Book of God in order to subvert its provisions to their own way of thought and their own selfish desires. For Azad, the Qur'ānic phrase "*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima*" in that verse means "They interpreted the verses as they liked and thus did distort the actual meaning of the original."[28] Nowhere in his *tafsīr* does Azad question the reliability and authenticity of the Torah and Gospels. He also devotes a considerable portion of his commentary to discussing other religious scriptures like the Upanishads.

In fact, as Ian Henderson Douglas has rightly noted, "His treatment of Hinduism is longer and more sympathetic than that of Judaism and Christianity, understandable enough in his situation in India."[29] For instance, he discusses various aspects of the Upanishads, including the notion of transcendentalism which is so central in the Qur'ānic view of God. He concludes that "the process of *neti-neti* [means "neither this, nor that] of the Upanishads affords a very advanced view of transcendentalism."[30]

In his treatment of Q.5:41 Azad offers some sort of historical background of the verse. This is significant because he seldom refers to a historical context of the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in interpreting the Qur'ānic verses. In fact, all of the six modern exegetes examined in this dissertation allude to the same occasion of revelation. The Prophet had allegedly been approached by Jewish scholars to decide on the case of adultery. Azad does not name these

[27] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967), vol.2, p. 24.
[28] Ibid., p. 285.
[29] Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 207.
[30] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 129.

Jewish scholars. In his account, the Torah prescribes stoning for adultery and fornication, and slaying for the slayer, but to absolve influential people who committed crimes, the Jewish scholars gave specious interpretations of law. Some of them came to Muḥammad assuming that the Prophet of Islam did not have any knowledge of Jewish law. He was, however, cautioned by a revelation, and he made them state the exact Jewish law and his decision was given in accordance with it.[31]

Moreover, Azad argues that the problem at stake here is not that the Torah had lost validity, but rather that some of Jewish scholars did not want to apply its law of adultery "because the accused were men of influence or were those who had bribed the priests to save them from the rigors of the Jewish law."[32] He discusses the intersection of the Qur'ān, the Gospel and the Torah as follows:

> The Qur'ān makes it clear that the law of God was first revealed through the Torah, and was then confirmed by the Gospel. The Qur'ān was delivered to confirm and give final recognition to all that had been revealed before and to be a guardian over them. Had the Qur'ān not been revealed, all laws ever delivered before would have, through deliberate distortion, been suppressed altogether.[33]

Interestingly, although Azad must have heard about the well-known public debate in India between Kayrānawī and Pfander and subsequent polemical works written by both, however, he has never alluded to the event nor has he shown any sign of their influence on him. On the contrary, consistent with his idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn* (the unity of religion), an idea which we have discussed in the previous chapter, Azad strives to find common features between the Qur'ān and the Bible. He strongly believes that there is no conflict between the teaching of the Gospel and the Qur'ān. He says that

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[31] Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 296-297.
[32] Ibid., p. 297.
[33] Ibid.

> The injunctions of both scriptures are the same. Only the style employed in expression and the occasion for the utterance varies. Christ stressed for purification of the heart, and did not attempt to lay down a law, for, the law of Moses was there, and did not choose to alter it. He merely desired that this law should be applied to purify the spirit. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, presents ethics and law simultaneously. Naturally, therefore, it has to assume a style and expression which should create no doubts as to the purposes to be served.[34]

Azad makes it clear that Jewish and Christian scriptures known in Muḥammad's time were authentic. He emphasizes the verses of the Qur'ān which indicate that the Qur'ān was meant to confirm them. Moreover, in his inquiry concerning the identity of Dhu al-Qarnayn, by whom he understands Cyrus, the King of Persia and Media (d. 529 B.C.), he quotes copiously from the Jewish texts in order to reinforce his thesis.[35] He also emphasizes that the People of the Book in Muḥammad's time had been inveigled into self-complacency and moral degeneration. They clung to their own (mis-)interpretations which had no basis in the Holy Books.

Unlike Qāsimī and Azad, Rashīd Riḍā – living in a somewhat polemical environment in Egypt – emphasizes the textual distortion of the Bible. In his journal *al-Manār,* he wrote several articles responding to Christian missionaries in Egypt and were later compiled into a book entitled *Shubahāt al-Naṣārā wa ḥujaj al-Islām* (Christian criticisms and Islamic proofs).[36] Even in his book discussing the nature of Muhammadan revelation (*al-waḥy al-Muhammadī*), Riḍā refers to the Bible with a polemical tone. For instance, he writes: "Any rational person who has read the scriptures of the People of the Book, commonly known as the Old and New Testaments,

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[34] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 82.

[35] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol.3, pp. 372-383. Azad's discussion of Dhu al-Qarnayn has been praised by a number of scholars. Ravindra Kumar, for instance, asserts that "Some of his [Azad's] comments on verses, as, for instance, about Dhul Qarnayn, are pieces of original research and show his extensive knowledge of world history." See Ravindra Kuman, *Life and Works of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1991), p. 74. It is worth noting that the identification of Dhu al-Qarnayn with Cyrus the Great is endorsed by Shī'ī scholars such as Ṭabaṭabā'ī. See Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-a'lāmi lil-maṭbū'āt, 1980), vol. p.

[36] For a discussion on this book and its Arabic translation, see Simon A. Wood, *Christian Criticisms and Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍā's Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

and who is also familiar with the books of the Sunna and the Prophet's biography will know with certainty that no one could possibly believe that those scriptures were revealed by God, or that those who authored those scriptures were sinless Prophets."[37] However, Riḍā's interpretation of the *taḥrīf* verses is more nuanced than what we usually find in the two books mentioned above.

For Riḍā, the Qur'ānic phrase "*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima 'an mawāḍi'ihī*" could be understood as referring either to textual distortion or interpretational distortion. He refers to 'Abduh who says that *taḥrīf* is of two kinds: The first is the interpretation of a statement by understanding it differently from the intended meaning. 'Abduh maintains that "It is most likely that this is the meaning of *yuḥarrifūna* in this verse because this deliberate misinterpretation has led the Jews to oppose Muḥammad and reject his prophethood. They did that knowingly since they continued interpreting the prophecy until today as they interpreted the prophecy about Jesus and understood to mean a different person whom they are still waiting for."[38]

The second type of *taḥrīf,* according to 'Abduh, is the mixture of sentences or groups of words by taking them from one place in the book and placing them in another. This type of disorder can be seen in Jewish scriptures: They mixed up what they inherited from Moses with what was written after him over a period of times.[39] Nevertheless, this kind of *taḥrīf* did not harm the Muslims and was not the factor that prevented them from believing in what has been brought by Muḥammad. Here 'Abduh acknowledges that there is a textual distortion in the present version of the Bible. However, he understands Q.4:46 as pointing to the first type of *taḥrīf*. Thus, despite his view of the mixture of Biblical contents, it is evident from his commentary that

[37] Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī* (Cairo: al-Zahra lil-i'lām al-'arabī, 1988), p. 56. This book has been translated into English by Yusuf T. DeLorenzo, *The Muhammadan Revelation* (Virginia: al-Saadawi Publications, 1996).
[38] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1947), vol. 5, p. 140.
[39] Ibid.

‘Abduh did not accept the belief common among Muslims that the actual text of the Bible had been corrupted.[40]

As prelude to his choice of the second type of *taḥrīf*, Riḍā refers to the Indian Muslim scholar Raḥmatullāh al-Kayrānawī, whose polemical treatise entitled *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* was quite influential at the time. In concluding his analysis of Q.4:46, Riḍā seems to support Kayrānawī’s view of *taḥrīf*, namely, the corruption of the Bible took place both in actual texts and interpretation. He contends that some scholars have proven the corruption of the Old and New Testaments with many testimonies, and “there are a hundred of testimonies in *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* by shaykh Rahmatullah al-Hindī about tampering with actual texts and interpretation.”[41] Kayrānawī’s influence on Riḍā is evident in the latter’s exegesis of Q.5:14 that directs its polemic specifically to Christians: “And among those who said ‘We are Christians (*innā naṣārā*),’ We did take a covenant, but they forgot (*nasū*) a portion of which they were reminded of.” As mentioned earlier, the word “*nisyān*” is sometimes associated with the Qur’ānic accusation of falsification. In explicating this verse, Riḍā cites extensively several examples from Kayrānawī’s *Iẓhār al-Ḥaqq* to show the occurrence of textual falsification of the Gospels.[42]

Like Kayrānawī, Riḍā makes use of higher Biblical criticism advocated by European theologians. It is interesting to note the extent to which higher Bible criticism influences some Muslim exegetes. Christine Schirrmacher rightly notes that “In the nineteenth century a new wave of criticism emerged in Europe and quickly found its way into the Muslim world.”[43] While

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[40] Hugh Goddard is correct when noting that ‘Abduh’s position on the taḥrīf is that “[it] is in the interpretation of the text rather than in the text itself.” See Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1996), p. 46.
[41] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, pp. 140-141.
[42] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, pp. 288-302.
[43] See Schirrmacher, “The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century,” p. 274.

commenting on Q.4:46, Riḍā refers to Adam Clarke, a prominent commentator of the Bible, who said: "I suppose all the verses (Genesis 36: 31-39) have been transferred to this place from 1 Chron. i. 43-50 that it is not likely they might have been written by Moses and it is quite possible they might have been, at very early period, written in the margin of an authentic copy,… were supposed by the copyist to be a part of the text."[44] Riḍā also refers to Thomas Hartwell Horne whose works were also influenced by the historical criticism of European theology. For Riḍā, the Qur'ānic accusation of the corruption of previous scriptures in their present form became much clearer after western scholars had historically criticized them.

It is in his commentary on Q. 5:13 and 41 that Riḍā offers detail and straightforward explanations of the occurrence of both textual and interpretational distortions of the pre-Qur'ānic scriptures. As in the previous verses, here he reinforces his view that the existing Torah was written much later time from Moses' lifetime by referring to the writings of western scholars. On the lack of continual transmission (*tawātur*) of the Torah, for instance, Riḍā says, "The standard opinion among European historians is that the existing Torah was written several centuries after Moses."[45] He also believes that the Torah which was written by Moses "had been lost according to the consensus of Jewish and Christian historians and they did not have any other text and no one had ever memorized it the same way Muslims memorized the entire Qur'ān during the time

[44] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 141. Cf Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible: Commentary and Critical Notes* (Cincinnati: H.S. & J. Applegate, 1851), vol. 1, p. 142. This issue has also been attested by more recent studies. Paul D. Wegner, for instance, writes: "Deuteronomy 34 records the death of Moses, and verse 10 even states that 'since that time [i.e. the death of Moses] no Prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses,' which implies that this chapter must have been written sometime after Moses." See Paul D. Wegner, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 30. John J. Collins, Professor of Old Testament criticism at Yale, also concludes that "Traditionally, the books of the Torah were supposed to be works of Moses, but it has long been clear that Moses could not have been their author." See John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 9.

[45] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 283.

of the Prophet."[46] However, unlike earlier Muslim polemicists such as Kayrānawī who "came to conclusion that the Biblical texts are totally distorted,"[47] Riḍā still believes that some portions of the Bible originated from Moses, without specifying which parts of the Bible are not originated from Moses. He simply refers to the verse "they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of" (Q.5:13). Riḍā claims that "The truth is that they lost it (the Bible) when Babylonians burned their temple and destroyed their city. When they got their freedom they collected what they memorized from the Torah and recovered it through practice. In other words, they recovered it from some of their writings but forgot some parts."[48] He rejects the view of some *mufassirūn* that the forgotten part was the description of the Prophet, because "had they forgotten the whole description it would be unsound for God to say 'They recognize him (it) as they recognize their sons'" (Q.2:146)[49]

The commentary on Q. 5:13 ends with a discussion of the divine command to pardon and forgive the Jews for their treachery. Riḍā mentions four different opinions with regard to the interpretation of this part of the verse. Firstly, this pardon and forgiveness is applied to those few Jews who did not engage in treachery (*khā'ina*). Secondly, Muḥammad was to pardon and forgive all of them (*jamī'uhum*) and to treat them with respect and honor. Thirdly, this part of the verse has been abrogated. Fourthly, the majority of scholars argue that this pardon and

[46] Ibid.
[47] See Christine Schirrmacher, "The Influence of German Biblical Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century," in Andrew Sandlin (ed.) *A Comprehensive Faith: An International Festschrift for Rousas John Rushdoony* (San Jose, CA: Friends of Chalcedon, 1996), p. 119.
[48] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 284.
[49] Ibid. It seems that Riḍā, like many other Muslims, strongly believes that the Bible witnesses the truth of the Islamic tenets, which leads him to search for a "true gospel of Christ." In 1908 Riḍā published the Arabic version of what is known as "Gospel of Barnabas" (translated by Khalīl Sa'ādeh). On the cover of the *al-Manār* issue in which he announced its publication, Riḍā wrote clearly: "This Gospel is the narrative of Barnabas which he himself called the 'true Gospel,' whose privilege over other circulated Gospels is that it confirms monotheism, denies crucifixion, and gives elaborate prediction of our Prophet Muḥammad." Most scholars agree that Riḍā's main interest in the Gospel stems from the fact that it echoed the Qur'ānic image of Jesus and his servanthood to God. For a further discussion on this, see Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reform and Christianity*, pp. 213-242.

forgiveness is related to personal treacheries (*khiyānāt shakhṣiyya*) and not the breach of treaty which leads to war and insecurity. For his part, Riḍā emphasizes the point that the verse commands the believers not to kill them but to maintain peace. He gives several examples of Muḥammad's treatment of three Jewish tribes, namely Banū Qaynuqā', Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓa. According to Riḍā, the three Jewish tribes broke the treaty and threatened to kill Muḥammad, and in spite of that he chose to maintain peace and felt sufficient to expel them from his neighborhood.[50]

In his exegesis of Q.2:62, Riḍā briefly addresses a theological question of whether or not the occurrence of falsification and distortion in the Bible invalidates Judaism. While maintaining that some parts of their revelation had suffered from negligence (*nisyān*) and others from distortion (*taḥrīf*), he insists that "the substance of their religion (*jawhar dīnihim*) has remained recognizable, not distorted to the extent that guidance from its precepts is completely preserved."[51] Riḍā supports his view by referring to Q.5:43: "They have access to the Torah in which is the judgment of God." Christians (*masīḥiyyūn*) have a similar fate because "they have had the benefit of exposure to both the Jewish revelation (the Torah) and the injunctions of other

[50] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, pp. 286-287. Riḍā does not mention his sources, however, earlier Muslim historians such as Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī present more violent picture. It is worth noting that this apologetic tone in the presentation of Muḥammad's relation with the Jews of Medina can also be found in the modern biography of Muḥammad written by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Ḥayā Muḥammad* (Cairo: Maktabat al-nahḍah al-Misriyya, 1963). According to traditional historians, however, the Banū Qurayẓa were subject to far harsher repercussion for their treachery than that of the Banū Qaynuqā' and the Banū Naḍīr. Muhammad is reported to have ordered the men of the Banū Qaynuqa' to be executed and the women and children sold into slavery. For a detailed study of the various accounts of the punishment of the Banū Qurayẓa, see W. Montgomery Watt, "The Condemnation of the Jews of Banū Qurayẓah: A Study in the Source of the *Sīra*," *The Muslim World* 42 (1952): pp. 160-171; W.N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of Banū Qurayza and the Jews of Medina,"*The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1976): pp. 100-107; M.J. Kister, "The Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa: A Re-Examination of a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): pp. 61-96. For a critical assessment of recent scholarship on the Banū Qurayẓa, see Gordon Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 90-93.
[51] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 1, p. 337.

Prophets as well as what they preserved of the teachings of Jesus. Moreover, the living spirit of the summons is also to be found among them (*rūh al-da'wa mawjūd 'indahum*)."[52]

Riḍā's understanding of *taḥrīf* finds its way to the Indonesian reformer Hamka. In his exegesis of the *taḥrīf* verse of Q. 2:75, like that of Riḍā, he begins with the expectation of Muḥammad and his companions that the Jews would accept his Prophetic mission. However, unlike Riḍā, he does not specify the group of them (*farīq minhum*) in 2:75 who tampered with God's words out of their place. Instead, he says that some Jews had a habit (*kebiasaan*) of changing a verse (*ayat*) or its content and interpreting it differently. Since it was their habit, *taḥrīf* did not only take place at the time of Moses but also throughout history. During his lifetime Moses himself realized this habit, Hamka argues, and therefore he asked that the content of the Torah be put in writing so as to be remembered by next generations. However, even though the Torah has been written at the time of Moses, "the Jews took the liberty to change its content according to their own desires." [53] For Hamka, the end phrase of verse 2:75 "after they had comprehended it wittingly" means that they deliberately and consciously interpreted it wrongly and falsified their interpretation.

Hamka's exegesis of Q. 4:46 seems to have been largely based on Riḍā's *al-Manār*. A careful analysis on both commentaries on this verse reveals that Hamka does not read the western sources referred to by Riḍā, instead he just quotes them from the latter's *tafsīr*. It is by no means surprising that Hamka misspells names of two western scholars cited by Riḍā: Adam Clarck for Adam Clarke and Horn for Thomas Horne. Like Riḍā, he claims that "some commentators, who are not Muslims but rather Christian religious leaders, assert explicitly that

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pembimbing Massa, 1968), vol. 1, p. 202.

Ezra the copyist of the Torah (the Arabs usually called him ‘Uzayr) had added several materials to the Torah, and they also claim that several other materials could not be identified who added them. Nevertheless, they believe that those materials were not originally written by Moses."[54] On Q.5:13, Hamka emphasizes the point that "The original text of Moses' Torah was lost. This has been admitted by Jewish and Christian scholars."[55] He then quickly notes that "we are not denying the truth of the entire contents of the existing Torah. It certainly contains some truth, including the monotheistic teaching of Moses. But another part is not reliable, because it has been added or omitted."[56]

It seems that Riḍā and Hamka face some difficulty in understanding the scriptural status of the Jewish Torah since it (at least, some of it) was not written by Moses. This is also the case with the four Gospels, which "had been collected by some point in the second century AD."[57] The Lebanese Shī‘ī exegete Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya has the same problem when he begins his interpretation Q.5:14 as follows: "Among the strongest arguments about the distortion of the Gospel is that church leaders and historians of the four Gospels on which Christians rely in the fourth century differ with one another on such questions as: Who did write the Gospels? When were they written, with what language? These differences can be found in the *Encyclopédie française*."[58] It is generally accepted that the books that form the Bible had arisen in a wide range of human contexts and at various times, often as the result of the work of many hands. From the long history of collection and canonization of both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible we can conclude that "the books did not all begin as ‘Scripture,’ but came to be

[54] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 81.
[55] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 153.
[56] Ibid.
[57] John Barton, *How the Bible Came to Be* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 45.
[58] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif* (Beirut: Dār al-‘ilm lil-malāyīn, 1968), vol. 2, p. 32.

received as such through a process."[59] Much has been written about the complexity surrounding the origins and development of the Jewish and Christian Biblical canons. What these Muslim scholars fail to appreciate is that in the world of the believers once the texts became canonized their status changed and turned to be sacred texts. When the divinely inspired status of a religious text was recognized, it was treated as authoritative scripture. In the words of John Riches: "In the communities which recognize their new status, believers regard them as set apart, special texts to be treated like no other texts."[60] Like Islam, for both Judaism and Christianity the final authority for religious faith has always been driven from sacred scriptures. One author describes nicely the "basic properties" of the Jewish and Christian scriptures as follows: "Scripture is a *written* document believed to have a *divine origin* that faithfully *communicates the truth and will of God* for a believing community, and it *provides a source of regulations for the corporate and individual life.*"[61]

Unlike Riḍā and Hamka, Mughniyya is less concerned with historical criticism of the Bible. He rather attempts to connect the *taḥrīf*-verses with the problem of his time. He understands Q. 4:46 in the light of current political situations in the Middle East and elsewhere. He comments on the verse "Some of the Jews tamper with the word from its places" (4:46) as follows:

> [Description in these verses] is exactly like what they did with the resolution of the United Nations demanding Israel to pull out from territories they occupied on June 5, 1967, but they interpreted it merely to mean the necessity of dialogue with the Arabs, and thus they overlooked the duty of Gunnar Jarring,[62] UN Special Representative, to

[59] John Barton, *How the Bible Came to Be*, p. 53.
[60] John Riches, *The Bible: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 54.
[61] Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origins of the Bible: A Guide for the perplexed* (London: T&T Clark: 2011), p. 12.
[62] Gunnar Jarring was appointed on November 22, 1967 as a UN Special Representative to mediate between Israel and the Arab states.

> implement the resolution. They distorted out of context any statement that does not suit their evil purposes, even though they understood and knew that it was from God.[63]

To put the above quotation in context, as a result of the 5 June 1967 war between Israel and the Arab States (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) some Arab territories fell into the hands of Israeli forces. On November 22, 1967 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242, which urged the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Occupied Territories.[64] Writing this part of the *tafsīr* a year after that Arab defeat, as Mughniyya himself indicates "Here we are in 1968,"[65] he voices his deep resentments through the interpretation of these verses. He finds the source of grief and defeat to be the inability of Muslims to respond to the external challenge: "Many events and especially the catastrophe (*nakba*) of June 5, 1967 have confirmed that the source of our problems as Arabs and Muslims is the absence of strong and capable leaders in matters of power."[66] Mughniyya gives only brief explanation of the meaning of *taḥrīf* by referring to Riḍā's discussion of Kayrānawī's view mentioned above.

The largest part of Mughniyya's explanation of Q. 4:46 is taken up with explaining the speeches of the Jews and the words they should have said. According to his analysis, when the Jews said "We have heard and we disobey," it was because Muḥammad called them repeatedly to follow the truth and not to tamper with the word, but they insisted on their animosity. Mughniyya attempts to explicate the difficult phrase "*wa-isma' ghayr musma'in*" by saying that it means "no hearing from you and no response to what you call."[67] Modern translators of the Qur'ān offer different translations of the above phrase. Arthur Arberry translates it: "Hear, and

[63] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 2, p. 340.
[64] On this war and the UN resolution, see Dietrich Rauschning, Katja Wiesbrock, Martin Lailach, *Key Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly: 1946-1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[65] He says: "Nahn al-ān fi sana 1968." See Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 2, p. 339.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., p. 340.

be thou not given to hear"; Muḥammad Yusuf Ali: "Hear what is not heard"; Muḥammad Asad: "Hear without hearkening." Even more difficult to translate is the enigmatic Qur'ānic word "*rā'inā*" in "*rā'inā layyan bi-alsinatihim wa ṭa'nan fī al-dīn*" ("Observe us," twisting with their tongues and traducing religion). Some western scholars such as Von David Künstlinger compare *rā'inā* with the Hebrew imperative *r'enū* of the Jewish table prayer.[68] W. Montgomery Watt says, "the Qur'ān seems to want to stop the Jews saying "show regard for us" (*rā'inā*) because this resembles the Hebrew root for "evil" (*ra'*)."[69] In a similar vein, Andrew Rippin writes, "The notion of an inter-lingual play, perhaps رأى / רע , 'see' and 'evil', is seen to be the reason for the prohibition."[70]

Scholars have been for a while intrigued by the word "*rā'inā*", especially because the Muslims are not allowed to utter it: "O you who believe, do not say, '*rā'inā*,' but say, '*unẓurnā*' (regard us) and hear, as there is a grievous punishment for the unbelievers" (Q.2:104). The Muslim sources tend to refer to the word *rā'inā* as a verbal trick played by the Jews of Medina on the Muslims. Several reports recorded by Ṭabarī state that the Jews said it to mock the Prophet and thus it was banned.[71] Suyūṭi (d.911/1505) also presents the following report: "When two Jewish men, Mālik ibn al-Sayf and Rifā' ibn Zayd, met and talked to the Prophet they would say "*rā'inā sam'aka wa-isma' ghayr musma'*." The Muslims thought that this was something that the People of the Book [said] to honor their Prophets. So they said that to the Prophet. Thus,

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[68] See Von David Künstlinger, "Rā'inā," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 5:4 (1930): pp. 877-882.

[69] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 32.

[70] Andrew Rippin, "The Function of Asbāb al-nuzūl in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51:1 (1988), p. 18.

[71] Ṭabarī says: "*qāla ba'ḍuhum: hiya kalima kānat al-yahūd taqūluhā 'alā wajh al-istihzā' wa al-musabba fa-nahā alllāhu dhikrahū al-mu'minīn an yaqūlū dhālika li al-nabī*" (some scholars said: That was a word that Jews used to say to mock and insult, therefore God forbade the believers to utter it to the Prophet). See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1954), vol. 1, p. 460.

God revealed the verse [2:104]."[72] Wāḥidī (d.468/1075) acknowledges that "*rā'inā* was a severe curse in their language."[73]

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabaṭabā'ī argues that the word *rā'inā* can be understood as a form of *taḥrīf* mentioned at the beginning of the verse. He says "It is possible that what is meant by the distortion of the words from their place is their mischief mentioned soon after this sentence, where God says: 'they say 'We hear and we disobey,' and therefore this statement is connected to 'they distort' (*yuḥarrifūna*)."[74] In this reading, "*yaqūlūna sami'nā wa-'aṣaynā wa-isma' ghayr musma' wa rā'inā layyan bi-alsinatihim wa ṭa'nan fi al-dīn*" (they say, "We have heard and we disobey" and "hear, and may you not hear" and "Observe us," twisting with their tongues and traducing religion) constitutes an explanation of "*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima 'an mawāḍi'ihī*" (they distort the word from its places). In other words, the meaning of distortion of the word from its place is "to use a word in a wrong manner and wrong place. Usually when one says, 'We hear,' it indicates obedience, and it is generally completed by saying, 'We hear and obey.' It is totally disgraceful to say, 'We hear and we disobey'; or to use the word, 'We hear' as a mockery or derision." Ṭabaṭabā'ī argues that among the improper uses of language is *rā'inā* which was intended to insult Muḥammad and his religion.[75]

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[72] Suyūṭi, *Lubāb al-nuqūl fi asbāb al-nuzūl* (Cairo: Dār al-taḥrīr lil-ṭibā'a wa-al-nashr, 1962), p. 24.
[73] The full account of Wāḥidī is as follows: "The Arabs used to say [*rā'inā*] and when the Jews heard [the Muslims] saying it to the Prophet they were amazed at that. *Rā'inā* was a severe curse in their language. They said: "We used to curse Muḥammad secretly but now they now the curse of Muḥammad because it is (also) in their speech." They used to come to the Prophet and say: "O Muḥammad, *rā'inā*," and then they would laugh. One of the anṣār, Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda who knew the Jewish language, noticed it and said: "O enemies of God! May God's curse be on you! By Him who has the soul of Muḥammad in His hand, if I hear it anyone of you, I will break his neck!" They said: "Have you not said to him (yourself)?" So God revealed the verse [2:104]." See al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-jadīd, 1969), p. 31.
[74] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4, p. 364.
[75] Ibid., pp. 364-365.

The Iranian scholar is not quite sure whether *taḥrīf*-verses refer to textual or interpretational corruptions. When the Qur'ān says "they distort words from their places," it is possible that this verse indicates that "they misinterpret the words of Moses and other Prophets, reported in the Old Testament, giving it some unintended meaning, other than the actual one." Ṭabaṭabā'ī then notes that "It may also refer to literal alteration, i.e. they change the position of words, delete from and insert into the scripture, as is said about the present Torah."[76] Without making explicit his own opinion, Ṭabaṭabā'ī rather attempts to tackle a linguistic issue concerning "*min*" (of, from) in "*min al-ladhīna hādū…*" (Of those who are Jews…). He argues that the word "*min*" here is meant to avoid generalization. Thus, the verse should be translated as "Of those who are Jews, there is a group that distort words."[77]

His commentary on Q.2:75 is surprisingly brief. He does not even offer an explanation as to what the term "*taḥrīf*" means in spite of the fact that it is in this verse that the term occurs for the first time in the Qur'ān. However, in his interpretation of Q.5:41, by considering its *sabab al-nuzūl* concerning the stoning punishment, Ṭabaṭabā'ī seems to understand *taḥrīf* in terms of interpretational distortion. For him, this verse indicates that "a group of the Jews were involved in a religious problem; their Book contained clear divine order for it, but their scholars interpreted it differently."[78] He interprets the *taḥrīf*-verse along with other verses indicating that the Torah and the Gospel contain guidance (*hudan*) and light (*nūr*). The Qur'ānic phrase "Surely We sent down the Torah in which was guidance and light" (Q.5:44) is understood by Ṭabaṭabā'ī to mean that there was in it some guidance and some light with which the children of Israel were led to some cognizance and laws adequately suitable to their condition. Similarly, the Qur'ānic

[76] Ibid., p. 364.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 340.

description of the Gospel as containing guidance and light (Q.5:46) is parallel to what God said about the Torah. He then explains the meaning of guidance and light as follows: "the guidance is related to cognition, which guides in matters of faiths and beliefs, while the light in both places denotes sharī'a and laws."[79]

With this explanation, Ṭabaṭabā'ī is now in position to avoid a dismissive claim about the reliability of the previous scriptures. He contends that even if *taḥrīf* should be understood in literal meaning, i.e. textual corruption," "the present version of the Torah contains something (*shay'*) of the original Torah sent down to Moses."[80] He does not elaborate further which part is not of the original Torah, but simply asserts "this present Torah is the one meant by the Qur'ān when it makes mention of the word "*tawrā*."[81]

The Concealment of Truth

Related to the Qur'ānic charge of scriptural falsification are those verses that accuse the People of the Book of concealing the truth (*ḥaqq*) or what has been sent down to them (*mā unzila ilayhim*). The two most common verbs associated with concealment are "*katama*" (to conceal) in Q.2:42, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71, 187; and 4:37, and "*akhfā*" (to hide) in Q.5:15 and 6:91. Given that the Qur'ān contains several passages (Q.2:129, 7:157, 61:6) that came to be interpreted as evidence that Muhammad's coming has been announced by earlier Prophets and scriptures,[82] it is not surprising that most Muslim exegetes believe that the object of the concealment verses is the information and description of Muḥammad. The earliest Muslim biographers of Muḥammad

[79] Ibid., p. 346.
[80] Ibid., p. 342.
[81] Ibid.
[82] For a discussion of these three verses, see Jane McAuliffe, "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muhammad," in John C. Reeves (ed.) *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 107-131.

such as Ibn Isḥāq (d.150/767) have provided references to Gospel passages that in their judgment feature this prediction. The most popular passage for this purpose was the 'Paraclete' passage in the Gospel according to Saint John, which was understood by Christians as referring to the Holy Spirit.[83] In his *Sīra*, Ibn Isḥāq records a quotation from the Gospel of John, and renders the Paraclete as *al-Munahhamānā* (cf. the Hebrew *menahem*, "comforter"); he says that *al-Munahhamānnā* in Syriac is "Muḥammad", and that in Greek it is *al-Bāraqlītis* (Paraclete).[84]

In Q.61:6 the Qur'ān states that Jesus brought to his people the good tidings about a Prophet who would come after him, whose name is 'Aḥmad." Many Muslims believe that "Aḥmad" is a proper name and an alternative for Muḥammad, and some of them even associate it with "Paraclete." Some western scholars problematize the association the Qur'ānic Aḥmad with Muḥammad. A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop argue that the Qur'ānic phrase "*ismuhū aḥmad*" (his name is Aḥmad) is "an interpolation to be *dated after the death of Muḥammad.*"[85] W. Montgomery Watt does not agree with this view, and suggests instead that "*aḥmadu* must be

[83] See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounter*, p. 34; Sidney H. Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture: The Bible in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in the Middle Ages," in Thomas Heffernan and Thomas Burman (eds.) *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 36.

[84] Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabī* (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-madanī, 1963), vol. 1, p. 251. See also the passage as translated into English by Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 103-104. Elsewhere Guillaume argues that the Christian text that bears the closest resemblance to the quotation is the so-called 'Palestinian Syriac Lectionary.' See Guillaume, "The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina c. A.D. 700," *Andalus* 15 (1950): pp. 289-296. However, Sidney H. Griffith does not agree with Guillaume, arguing that "It seems unlikely that he [Ibn Isḥāq] would personally have consulted the Christian Palestinian Aramaic text of the Syro-Palestinian Lectionary, from which modern scholars have shown that his quotation ultimately derives. There are no known instances of a Muslim scholar in early Islamic times learning Syriac or any other dialect of Aramaic for the purpose of consulting the Christian Bible…. Given the close textual fidelity of Ibn Isḥāq's quotation to the actual, canonical Gospel according to Saint John, albeit with alterations he saw fit to make in light of his Islamic convictions, it seems most reasonable to suppose that he had the text from a Christian informant or possibly from a Christian convert to Islam." See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān and Jesus in al-Ya'qūbī's *Tārīkh*," in John C. Reeves (ed.) *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, pp. 140-141. The alteration that Griffith talks is "the phrase 'my Father' in the three places in the passage as it appears in Christian Bibles to 'the Lord'."

[85] A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, "The Paraclete, Al-Munhamānnā and Aḥmad," *The Muslim World* 51-4 (1951), p. 255 (pp. 251-256.). The emphasis is from the original text.

taken in an adjectival sense rather than regarded as an interpolation."[86] Watt, however, argues that the identification of Aḥmad as an alternative for Muḥammad was late, at least, after 200 A.H. To support his view, he refers to "Ibn Isḥāq [who] speaks of the verse in question, but does not mention Aḥmad as a name of the Prophet."[87] However, we find Muqātil in the first half of the second century has already referred to Aḥmad as *fāraqlīṭā* in Syriac in his commentary on Q.61:6.[88] This indicates that the identification of the Qur'ānic Aḥmad with the Paraclete of the New Testament is earlier than is sometimes assumed by modern scholars.[89]

The question that remains to discuss is how to reconcile between the accusation that the present versions of the Bible and the Gospel are corrupted and unreliable on the one hand and, on the other hand, the claim that the announcement about the coming of the Prophet can be found there. Riḍā solves the problem by arguing that, as mentioned above, those parts of the Bible and the Gospel that allude to the description of Muḥammad are authentic. It is instructive to see how Riḍā and other Muslim reformers understand the concealment verses that accuse Jews and Christians of concealing the truth about Muḥammad. In the early Muslim literature there are numerous stories about the ways in which the Jews and Christians concealed the passages foretelling Muḥammad. Sometimes there was physical concealment by sticking pages together or by obliterating a verse or putting one's hand over it.[90] A recent study of the early *tafsīr*s on concealment verses points to "the People of Book [who] have hidden information about the

[86] W. Montgomery Watt, "His Name is Aḥmad," *The Muslim World* 53-1 (1953), p. 110 (pp.110-117). See also Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounter*, p. 34.
[87] Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounter*, p. 34.
[88] Muqātil glosses the Qur'ānic phrase: "*mubashshiran bi-rasūl ya'tī min ba'dī ismuhū aḥmad*" (Q. 61:6) with "*bi al-suryāniyya faraqlīṭā*." See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaymān*, vol. 4, p. 316.
[89] For a discussion of this, see Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), pp. 22-43.
[90] For a discussion of stories mentioned by the earliest biographers of Muḥammad such as Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Sa'd, see W. Montgomery Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," pp. 50-62.

Prophet of Islam which they found in the books in their possession."[91] However, modern Muslim reformers offer more nuanced interpretations of the concealment verses.

The first concealment verse occurs in the Qur'ān is 2:42: "And do not confound the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) with vanity, and do not conceal the truth (*wa-lā taktumūna al-ḥaqq*) wittingly." This verse is repeated almost verbatim in 2:71; the only difference is that the former is addressed to the children of Israel (*yā banī isrā'īl*), whereas the latter to the People of the Book (*yā ahl al-kitāb*). In his exegesis of Q.2:42, Riḍā explains that the scriptures of the People of the Book contain both a warning against the emergence of false Prophets among them with the ability to show extraordinary acts (*'ajā'ib*) and a promise that God would send among them a Prophet from the descendants of Ishmael. But their priests and leaders confounded the truth with vanity in order to mislead the people to think that Muḥammad was among the false ones.[92] As for Q.2:71, Riḍā distinguishes between the confounded truth and the concealed one. The former is "the truth that was brought by all Prophets and for which the scriptures were revealed, namely the worship of God alone, good deeds and the good tiding about a Prophet from the children of Ishmael who would teach the Book and wisdom to the mankind."[93] The latter is related especially to "the good tiding about the Prophet."[94] He further argues that the confounding and concealment was done through "various interpretations of and inferences from the words and actions of their predecessors based on the assumption that their predecessors were the most

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[91] Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān*, p. 145.
[92] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 1, p. 292.
[93] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 332.
[94] Ibid.

knowledgeable about the words of the Prophets and the most ardent followers of them. Thus they regarded their predecessors as mediators between them and the Prophets."[95]

Another verse that uses the phrase "*yaktumūna al-ḥaqq*" is Q. 2:146: "Those to whom We have given the book recognize him (it) as they recognize their sons, even though there is a group of them that conceal the truth wittingly." Riḍā connects this verse to the previous one that deals with the change of *qibla*, although the connection does not seem clear. The object of concealment is not the information about the *qibla*, but rather about the prophethood of Muḥammad. He argues that the People of the Book's rejection of the change of the *qibla* is mentioned in this verse, namely "that they recognize the Prophet because of what has been written in their scriptures, including the good tiding about him, his description and characteristics which are not applicable to others…. as they recognized their sons."[96] He relates a statement attributed to 'Abdullāh ibn Salām, who was one of the Jewish scholars and priests: "I recognize him more than I recognize my son." 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb asked: "How?" He said: "Because I have no doubt at all about Muḥammad as a Prophet, as for my son it is possible that my wife betrayed [or, was unfaithful]."[97] Riḍā does not identify "*farīq minhum*" (a group of them) in the verse, but simply asserts that "this concealment was attributed only to a group of them (the People of the Book) because not all of them did so. Among them there were some who recognized the truth, believed and followed it, while others rejected it out of ignorance."[98]

In five verses the object of concealment varies. It includes "testimony" (*shahāda*) in 2:140; "the explanations and the guidance that We have sent down" (*mā anzalnā min al-bayyināt*

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[95] Ibid., vol. 1, 293.
[96] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 20.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

wa al-hudā) in 2:159; "the book that God has sent down" (*mā anzala Allāh min al-kitāb*) in 2:174; "covenant" or "compact" (*mīthāq*) in 3:187; and "the bounty that God has given them" (*mā ātāhum Allāh min faḍlihī*) in 4:37. In these verses Riḍā does not restrict the object of concealment to the good tiding about Muḥammad. As for 2:140, he argues that the testimony being concealed is of two kinds: The First is concerning the *milla* of Abraham as if the Qur'ān says: "You have in your possession a testimony from God that Abraham was on the truth. If you concealed that for the sake of insulting Islam, you have concealed the testimony of God."[99] The second testimony refers to "the testimony of the scripture foretelling that God would send among them a Prophet from the children of their brothers, namely the Arabs the children of Ishmael."[100] Riḍā understands the concealment in 4:37 not as referring to the question of prophecy at all, but rather to "the concealment of knowledge and wealth" (*kitmān al-'ilm wa al-māl*).[101]

It is in his exegesis of 2:159 that Riḍā discusses at length the nature of concealment of the People of the Book with regard to the good tiding about Muḥammad. He begins by accusing the People of the Book of misinterpreting the word "Paraclete" (*al-fāraqlīṭ*). Unfortunately, Riḍā does not explain how he comes to understand "Paraclete" as referring to Muḥammad. In elucidating the meaning of this verse, he relies heavily on 'Abduh who regards the verse as an argument against the unbelievers in general and the Jews in particular, because of their rejection of the prophethood of Muḥammad. God characterized them as having "concealed what has been sent down concerning Muḥammad" because they claimed that the previous Prophets did not foretell the coming of a Prophet from the Arabs, the children of Ishmael, and nothing was

[99] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 490
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 99.

mentioned in their scriptures about his religion and Book."[102] One may ask: Was there only one codex that only a small group of scholars, who were all antagonistic against Muḥammad, could get a hold of? What kind of authority did these rejecters have so that they could literally hide parts of the text? Riḍā anticipates these questions, saying that "Indeed, the Book was only in the hands of their leaders, and the general people (*al-'āmma*) were not able to get access to the text."[103]

Riḍā acknowledges that Muslim scholars differ on the nature of concealment. Some scholars argue that the People of the Book suppressed Muḥammad's descriptions and characteristics from the scriptures in their possession. He disagrees with this view, arguing that that is not plausible (*ghayr ma'qūl*) because it is impossible for the People of the Book all over the world to do such a thing. Otherwise, we would notice differences in their scriptures from one place to another. Other scholars maintain that the People of the Book rejected the Prophet by ways of distorting, interpreting and understanding his descriptions to mean different things.[104] At the end of his discussion, Riḍā draws important lessons from the verse, saying that "the verse has a general application in the sense that whoever conceals God's signs and His guidance from the people, he deserves God's curse."[105] He then discusses whether the Muslims are obliged to proclaim the words of God at any time or only when they are asked.

A connection between the concealment verses and the announcement of the Prophet in Jewish and Christian scriptures is prevalent in Hamka's *tafsīr*. In his brief comment on Q.2:42, Hamka reiterates Riḍā's statement that the Torah contains both a warning about false Prophets

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[102] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 49.
[103] Ibid., vol. 7, p. 617.
[104] Ibid., pp. 49-50.
[105] Ibid., p. 51.

and an announcement of the coming of a true Prophet, and all descriptions of a true Prophet therein fit with the Prophet Muḥammad. However, the Jewish leaders misled their followers from believing in Muḥammad. Moreover, when they were asked about the promised Prophet, they concealed the truth by interpreting the passages differently.[106] Hamka maintains that the prediction and prefiguration of Muḥammad can be found not only in the revelations sent down to Moses and Jesus, but also in that which was sent down to other Prophets. "There had been mentioned his descriptions and his origin to an extent that they recognized him as they recognized their sons," claims Hamka.[107] He makes it explicit that "the passages that describe the coming of Muḥammad are still preserved in their scriptures today."[108]

In his exegesis of Q.2:159, Hamka cites a number of Biblical passages which, for him, point to the good tiding about the Prophet Muḥammad, including Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-22. He pays a special attention to passages in which Moses himself alerts his followers: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet from among your own people like myself; him you shall heed" (18:15), and later in 18:18) the text shifts to God's voice: "I will raise up a Prophet for them from among their own people like yourself [Moses]; I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him. And if anyone fails to heed the words he speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account." Hamka emphasizes the phrase "like yourself (Moses)" and notes that the similarity between Moses and Muḥammad is more profound than that of Moses and Jesus. Both Moses and Muḥammad were naturally born persons; the former was the descendant of the children of Israel, whereas Muḥammad the descendant of the children of Ishmael. However, the Jews concealed this truth, while the Christians interpreted the above

[106] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, p. 161.
[107] Ibid., vol.2, p. 20.
[108] Ibid., p. 21.

passages to mean Jesus, not Muḥammad. During the lifetime of the Prophet, Hamka argues, "they strove to prevent the passages from falling into the hands of the believers, but in the present time thanks to the advancement of printing technology they could not conceal them any longer."[109] Nevertheless, he further argues, they still try their best to interpret them differently.

Hamka goes on to quote several passages from the New Testament while explicating Q.5:15, including the Gospel of John 15:26, 16:12-13, 19:11-15; Matthew 9:8, 10 and 34, and Luke 12:51-53. The verse Q.5:15 reads as follows: "O People of the Book, now there has come to you Our messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the book." The word used in this verse is "*akhfā*" (to hide, to conceal). Like earlier exegetes, he interprets the verse within the context of the punishment of adultery committed by a noble married Jewish man and woman. When their leaders came to the Prophet seeking his judgment in this regard, Muḥammad asked them about the punishment of adultery in the Torah. Hamka writes, "In Deuteronomy 22:22-26, it is prescribed there that the punishment for adultery is stoning. However, they concealed that ruling from the Prophet."[110] Among Jewish leaders who were accused of hiding those passages was Ibn Ṣūriyya, but then came ʻAbdullāh ibn Salām who knew the content of the Torah and read the passages prescribing the punishment.[111] Then Hamka

[109] Ibid., p. 47. Perhaps, Hamka has in mind concealment stories related by biographers of Muḥammad such as Ibn Saʻd. One of such stories was that a Christian orphan, being brought up by an uncle, was one day reading in his uncle's copy of the Gospel when he came across a thick page, which proved to be two pasted together; he separated them and discovered a description of Muḥammad, which mentioned such points as that he was of medium height, of a fair complexion, of the seed of Ishmael and called Aḥmad. The uncle found the boy and beat him, and when the boy said, "This has the description of the Prophet Aḥmad," replied, "He has not yet come." A similar story is told of a learned Jew, al-Zubayr ibn Bata, who found a book which his father had kept hidden in which there was a description of a Prophet Aḥmad, but when Muḥammad began to proclaim his message at Mecca, Zubayr obliterated this passage and denied its existence. See Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. i/2.89. 14-25 and i/1.104-10.
[110] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 16, p. 161.
[111] Ibid.

claims that the Jews and Christians were not only concealing the Biblical passages concerning the punishment of adultery, but also the passages about the prophethood of Muḥammad.

Another concealment verse that uses the word "*afkhā*" is Q.6:91. Hamka explicates this verse under the sub-title "Memungkiri Nubuwwat" (Rejecting the prophethood). In this verse, the Jews were accused of "putting it (the book) into parchments, revealing them and hiding much."[112] Hamka paraphrases this accusation as follows: "The Torah that you have made it as parchments (*taj'alūnahū qarāṭīsa*), means that you have put it into a written form in such a way that you might read it. Then you revealed honestly some of its content, but you concealed other parts whenever you deemed them unfavorable to you. Among those parts that you concealed was information about the prophethood of Muḥammad."[113]

In contrast to Riḍā and Hamka, Abul Kalam Azad does not identify the object of concealment verses as referring to the prophecy about the coming of Muḥammad. Instead, he understands the term "*al-ḥaqq*" as an unqualified truth. On Q.2:140, he simply says "Willful suppression of truth is a heinous sin."[114] He even does not make it explicit that the Qur'ān directs its condemnation of concealment specifically against the People of the Book. He understands "*mā anzalnā min al-bayyināt wa al-hudā*" in 2:159 as "the teaching of the Book of God."[115] He further argues that the propagation of the teaching of the Book of God is a collective obligation (*jamā'atī farḍ hī*), and those who conceal it either through fear or in self-interest deserve divine

[112] "*Taj'alūnahū qarāṭīsa tubdūnahā wa tukhfūna kathīran*." Scholars differ significantly on their translation of this phrase. Yusuf Ali: "But ye make it into (separate) sheets for show, while ye conceal much (of its contents)"; Arthur Arberry: "You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding much"; Marmaduke Pickthall: "Ye have put on parchments which ye show, but ye hide much (thereof)";
[113] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 253.
[114] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol.2, p. 54.
[115] Ibid.

condemnation.[116] When interpreting Q. 3:71 which begins with "*yā ahl al-kitāb*," Azad relates the concealment to the exclusivist claim of the People of the Book:

> The basic defect in the position of the People of the Book was that they regarded the privilege of knowing the truth of religion to be exclusive to their own people or their group. Their contention was that none who did not belong to them could be a repository of truth, or of anything higher than what they possessed, and that was to have been given to man had been given to them, and that thereafter the treasure-house of divine graciousness had been scaled forever.[117]

Like Riḍā, Azad understands that 2:146 was revealed in the context of the change of *qibla*, and argues that the objection raised by the Jews and the Christians to the shifting of the *qibla* "was the outcome of their racial and sectarian prejudices."[118] However, he is quick to note that "the issue of *qibla* is not of the fundamentals of religion, and it cannot be regarded as a determining factor in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Every group of people chose for themselves a particular direction for prayer."[119] It seems that Azad is referring to Q.2:148: "Every man has his direction to which he turns; so be you forward in good works. Wherever you may be, God will bring you all together; surely God is powerful over everything." Based on this verse, he argues that devotion to God "is not conditioned by any such direction. What primarily matters is righteous living. It is in this endeavor that one should compete with one another. That is the real function of piety and devotion to God."[120] As for the "*mīthāq*" (covenant, compact) that is being concealed by the People of the Book in Q.3:187, Azad simply refers to "their duty

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., vol.2, p. 161.
[118] Ibid., p. 59.
[119] Ibid., p. 60.
[120] Ibid.

to preach and uphold the teachings of the Book." According to Azad, the People of the Book have fallen into wrong ways and have disregarded their covenant with God.[121]

Qāsimī offers a more nuanced approach to the object of concealment verses. Of all concealment verses, only in two places (Q.3:71 and 5:15) does he explicitly refer to the description and information about Muḥammad as being concealed. He contends that "the People of the Book know what is in the Torah and the Gospel of the good news about the coming of Muḥammad and his prophethood, yet they conceal it from people."[122] However, the main contention of Q.3:71 is not about Muḥammad's prophecy in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, but rather the abominable act of concealing the truth.[123] It seems that Qāsimī tries to downplay the importance of associating the concealment verses with the prophecy about Muḥammad. In his exegesis of 5:15, he contends that the People of the Book concealed several things including the sending forth of Muḥammad, the stoning punishment in the Torah, and the prophecy about Jesus.[124]

Mughniyya's approach to the concealment verses is similar to that of Qāsimī. In a number of other verses Mughniyya tends to generalize the Qur'ānic discourse on the concealment of truth. On Q.2:159, for instance, he asserts that whoever has knowledge about aspects of religion but conceals them, God's curse will incur on him. He then says, "The curse for concealment does not apply specifically to the People of the Book, but includes anyone who conceals the truth."[125] He provides three reasons for his view of generalizing discourse. Firstly, there is nothing in the verse that can be understood as specific to certain people. Secondly, even

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[121] Ibid., p. 203.
[122] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 4, p. 865.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 1920.
[125] Ibid., p. 247.

if we assume that the context of revelation is concerning what has been done by the People of the Book, the context should not restrict the general wording of a text. Thirdly, the *raison d'être* of the occurrence of divine curse is concealment, and thus it is applied to any type of concealment.[126] To reinforce his view, Mughniyya cites a prophetic tradition: "Whoever is asked about a knowledge (*'ilm*) he knows but he conceals it, he will be bridled with a bridle of fire."[127] He then spends a great deal of time explaining the burden of every Muslim with regard to the teaching and preaching of religion.

In a similar vein he interprets Q.2:174 to mean "whoever knows something of the truth (*shay'an min al-ḥaqq*) but he conceals it with an interpretation and falsification for personal benefit, be he a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim."[128] He is fully aware of the fact that the verse was revealed for a specific context, i.e. the People of the Book who concealed the description about Muḥammad. Nevertheless, he argues that *asbāb al-nuzūl* should not delimit the scope and validity of the text. The general rule usually observed in this context, according to Mughniyya, is that one goes by the general sense of such words rather than simply the specific meaning suggested by the occasion of revelation (*al-'ibra bi-'umūm al-lafẓ, la bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab*)."[129] He cites 'Abduh as reported by Riḍā in his *al-Manār*: "Among Muslims there are those who conceal what God has sent down by advocating a false interpretation in a manner similar to what Jews have done by concealing the description of the Prophet."[130]

It is telling that Mughniyya understands the imperative phrase in Q.3:187 "You shall make it (*mīthāq*, covenant) clear unto the people, and not conceal it" as referring to "the duty of

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[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid. Cf. Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, eds. Shu'ayb al-Arnut and Muhammad Kamil (Beirut: Dar al-risala al-'alamiyya, 2009), vol. 5, p. 500.
[128] Ibid. vol. 1, p. 266.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., p. 268.

religious scholars” (*waẓīfa ‘ulamā al-dīn*). Not only does he understand that the covenant is not specifically related to the People of the Book, but also that “those who have been given the Book include Jews, Christians and Muslims.”[131] The covenant here is understood by Mughniyya as referring to “God’s compact and covenant to anybody who has been given the privilege to know His commandments in order to spread them and reveal them to people.” Thus the learned person of religious matters (*umūr dīniyya*) is obliged to make clear what has been sent to His Messengers, and whoever conceals it would be responsible to God. Mughniyya calls this religious duty “a general principle” (*mabda’ ‘ām*) which is not specific to one religious scholar to the exclusion of another or specific to adherents of one religion to the exclusion of another. According to Mughniyya, there are a number of *mufassirūn* who understand the verse as referring to Jewish scholars who concealed the matter of Muḥammad (*amr Muḥammad*), while others consider it to include both Jews and Christians. For his part, he argues that the verse “denotes a general application because there is no evidence to support its particularity.”[132] It is only in Q.2:146 that he specifically refers the concealment to prophecy as follows: “Many Jewish and Christian scholars knew correctly the prophethood of Muḥammad as they knew their sons without any doubt.”[133] We are also told about his conversation with an unidentified “Italian orientalist” (*mustashriq Iṭālī*), who asks: “The Qur’ān explicitly recognizes the Gospel, why do the Muslims reject it?” In his response, Mughniyya argues that the Qur’ān recognizes a Gospel that proclaims the coming of Muḥammad (Q.7:157), and that the Qur’ān speaks of Jesus as being

[131] “*Li-anna al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb yashmal al-yahūd wa al-naṣārā wa al-muslimīn*.” See Ibid., vol.2, p. 226. It is relevant to quote Riḍā’s definition of *ahl al-kitāb* here: “All people of ancient religions, such as Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, belonged also to the category of *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of the Book) and were followers of Prophets, but paganism and polytheism crept in to the extent that we do not know [the reality] of their scriptures anymore.” See the journal *al-Manār* 25-3 (1924): p. 226.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 1, p. 233.

created in a similar manner to Adam (Q.3:59). He then asks: Your Gospel says that Jesus is God, how do you expect us to believe in it and at the same time believe in the Qur'ān?"[134]

Ṭabaṭabā'ī brings the occasions of revelation into discussion and calls into question the tendency of early *mufassirūn* to particularize the concealment verses within specific contexts. Perhaps, his most noteworthy contribution to the whole discussion on this hermeneutical category known as "*asbāb al-nuzūl*" is his skeptical attitude to it. On Q.5:15 which most *mufassirūn* relate it to the punishment of stoning in the Torah which is being concealed,[135] Ṭabaṭabā'ī argues that "these reports [of its occasion of revelation], like most of the narratives giving theoretical reasons, are in fact mere attempts to fit some occurrences on a verse, and then claiming that it was revealed for this reason. These are merely theoretical reasons; the verse most probably does have general application."[136] Similarly, in his discussion of transmitted material (*baḥth riwā'ī*) of Q. 3:187, he explicitly expresses his skeptical attitude to the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, arguing that "It should be noted here that there are numerous traditions purporting to give the reason of revelation of these verses, but we have left them out because evidently they are merely people's attempts to apply the verses to various events, they are not real reasons of revelation."[137]

Of all concealment verses, only in Q.2:146 that Ṭabaṭabā'ī talks about "the People of the Book [who] recognize the messenger of God by the prophecies which their scripture contains, as they recognize their sons, and a group of them most surely conceal the truth while they know

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[134] Ibid., p. 234.
[135] Ṭabarī, for instance, mentions the context of revelation of this verse as related to an incident in which Jews came to the Prophet asking about the punishment of stoning. He also cites several scholars who maintain that "among those which Jews concealed from their scripture and the Prophet came to explain to them was the stoning for married who committed adultery." See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 10, pp. 140-142.
[136] Tabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 285.
[137] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 85.

[it]."[138] He appears to devote his attention to explaining the rhetorical change in this verse, because in the previous verses the Prophet is addressed in second person singular pronouns, whereas in this verse he is mentioned in third person, and the talk is addressed to the believers; and then the next verse again reverts to the previous style and is addressed to the Prophet. For Ṭabaṭabā'ī, this style of authorial voice is intended "to show that the truth of the Prophet was clear and well-known to the People of the Book."[139] This change of rhetorical device, he further agues, reminds the reader of excellent virtues of the Prophet. The speaker (God) addresses the Prophet, but for some reason He wants to describe the virtues and excellence of the addressee and turns towards the audience and treats him as absent, mentioning him by pronoun of third person. When the topic is finished, He again assumes the previous style of addressing him directly.[140]

The Qur'ānic phrase "Those who conceal the proofs and the guidance which We send down" (Q.2:159) is understood by Ṭabaṭabā'ī as referring to all learned people, irrespective of their religions. The concealment here means either "hiding the verses themselves from the people, or concealing their true meaning through misinterpretation and misapplication – as the leaders of the Jews did with the verses prophesying the advent of Muḥammad."[141] However, Ṭabaṭabā'ī is quick to note that the word "proofs" (*bayyināt*) could be understood in its general meaning as "the verses, signs, and the arguments which are clear evidences, proofs and attestations for the truth. The *bayyināt*, as used in the divine speech, is a special description for the revealed verses." Often time Ṭabaṭabā'ī does not specify the object of concealment to the

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[138] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 327.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., p. 388.

question of prophecy but keeps other possibilities open. On Q.2:174 he rather explains the purpose of concealment, saying that "the People of the Book did not conceal what they did only because they wanted to protect their high position and prestige in the community, but also because they did not like to stem the flow of gifts, riches, and properties which their power supposedly entitled to."[142] He explicitly states that the object of concealment in Q.3:71 is not verse of scripture, because the Qur'ān "does not speak about the verses which the People of the Book had altered, hidden or misinterpreted." Rather, the confusion and the concealment in the verse refer to "their confounding and hiding of the religious knowledge and realities."[143]

From the above discussion we learn that reformist Muslim approaches to the concealment verses vary not only in terms of what is being concealed, but also who might conceal. It seems to me that there is tendency among Muslim reformers to generalize the object of concealment to include other than the question of prophesy, which allows them to apply the concealment of truth to Muslims as well. Their discussion of scriptural predictions about Muḥammad and other matters tends to prod them to moderate accusations of textual corruption. One may ask: How do Muslim scholars cite passages from the Bible to support their contention while at the same time question its reliability? However, there is no correlation in that those who find many predictions tend to hold to corruption of interpretation or to genuineness of the Biblical texts, while those who find few or no predictions tend to hold to the corruption of the text. This is in contrast to Patrick O'Hair Cate's conclusion that "The less corrupt one believes the Bible to be, the more predictions he tends to find."[144] Of the six Muslim reformers discussed above, Riḍā and Hamka

[142] Ibid., p. 426.
[143] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 256.
[144] See Patrick O'Hair Cate, *Each Other's Scripture: The Muslim's Views of the Bible and the Christian's Views of the Qur'ān* (PhD Dissertation, Hartford Seminary, 1974), p. 78.

are the most dismissive about the reliability of the Biblical text, however, they strongly believe that the Bible contains passages predicting the coming of Muhammad. On the other end of the spectrum, Qāsimī and Azad do not relate the concealment verses to the question of prophecy, yet they believe in the reliability of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Between Twisting the Tongues and Writing the Book with Hands

As there is a spectrum of Muslims' views of *taḥrīf* and concealment verses, so there is also a wide variety of Muslims' views of the Qur'ānic accusation that the People of the Book twist (*yalwūna*) their tongues and write (*yaktubūna*) the book with their hands in the following verses:

> And there is a group of them twist their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, "It is from God," yet it is not from God, and they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly (Q.3:78).

> So woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings (Q.2:79).

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī interprets these two verses in connection with the two issues discussed above, namely, the issues of scriptural falsification and concealment. He points out that Ibn Kathīr has glossed the Qur'ānic phrase "a group of them twist their tongues with the book" as meaning "a group of them distort the word from its place, change God's word, and remove it from its true meaning in order to make the ignorant think of it as if it is in the book of God."[145] Qāsimī cites several other sources to make the point that *taḥrīf* here must be understood in terms of interpretational distortion, not textual one. Such early authorities as Mujāhid, Sha'bī, Qatāda and Rabī' ibn Sulaymān are quoted by Qāsimī to have said as follows: "they twist their tongues" means "they distort it" (*yuḥarrifūnahū*); and the traditionalist Bukhārī also makes it

[145] See Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 4, p. 871.

clear that the meaning of *yuḥarrifūnahū* in this context is "they remove (*yazīlūna*), and no one could be able to remove a word of the Book of God. Instead, they distort it and interpret it differently from its right meaning."[146] A more straightforward conclusion is given by Wahb ibn Munabbih (d.114/732) who said: "Verily, the Torah and the Gospel that God has revealed have not been changed, not even one letter (*ḥarf*). However, they go astray with their distortion and interpretation."[147]

Consistent with this line of understanding, Qāsimī interprets Q.2:79: "those who write the book with their hands" to mean those who write the book based on their wrong interpretation. What book do they write? Only Qāsimī and Hamka do address this question, though they differ significantly. Qāsimī asserts that some of the early scholars (*ba'ḍ al-salaf*) maintain that the Jewish leaders did alter (*yughayyirūn*) the information about the Prophet from the Torah, and then they claimed that was coming from God. But the alteration is not of the text of the Torah, but rather its interpretation. One should keep in mind, Qāsimī suggests, that the nature of information about the Prophet contained in the Torah is far from being explicit. There are just some indications (*ishārāt*), and only those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*) may recognize such indications. The general readers would have some difficulty in understanding them. Qāsimī then concludes: "From this brief exploration, it is clear that what they write with their hands is the distorted interpretations (*ta'wīlāt muḥarrafa*)."[148]

Hamka offers a different explanation. In his treatment of Q.3:78, Hamka offers an interesting observation, which at least no other modern exegetes examined in this chapter have proposed. Namely, that he thinks of the Talmud as a compilation of writings by learned Jews

[146] Ibid., pp. 871-872.
[147] Ibid., p. 872.
[148] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 175.

which they claimed to have been divinely inspired.[149] In other words, the word "*kitāb*" (book) in the Qur'ānic phrase "Woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, 'This is from God'" is understood by Hamka as referring to the Talmud. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this issue.[150] Instead, he chooses to contextualize the verse by claiming that "while we read this verse we should not imagine only what happened to the Jews at the time of Muḥammad, and we forget our own negligence. Because of our negligence we have been colonized for about 300 years by other nations."[151] Here he is referring to the Indonesian experience under colonialization. He further asserts that "This verse was revealed on the children of Israel at the time of the Prophet, but today we – the Muslims – must introspect ourselves as if we follow their path."[152] Hamka concludes his discussion of the verse by quoting a Prophetic *ḥadīth*: "You will certainly follow the path of those who came before, span by span and cubit by cubit."[153]

Riḍā begins his discussion of Q.3:78 by identifying who this group is. According to Riḍā, while the majority of Muslim scholars point to "some Jewish learned in Medina," Ibn 'Abbās refers to "the Jews who took side with Ka'b ibn Ashraf, one of their heretic leaders opposing and

[149] Ibid., pp. 204-205.
[150] It is not clear whether Hamka understands the Talmud as belonging in the Jewish sacred scriptures. According to Reuven Firestone, the Talmud represents "a vast sea of Jewish tradition that applies the laws of Torah in intricate detail to the daily ritual and spiritual, civic, social, personal, and moral life of the Jew." It comprises of the Mishnah (the Hebrew term for collection of learning) and Gemara (completion). The former is a vast repertoire of oral wisdom that was handed down from sage to disciple for many generations and was collected and put into writing around the year 200 C.E. The latter was supplementary commentary on the Mishnah and written in Aramaic, and together they form the Talmud. See Reuven Firestone, *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims* (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2001), pp. 40-44.
[151] Qasimi, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, p. 205.
[152] Ibid., p. 205.
[153] Ibid. The complete ḥadīth in Bukhari is as follows: On the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī that the Prophet said: "You will follow the ways of those nations who were before you, span by span and cubit by cubit (i.e., inch by inch) so much so that even if they entered a hole of a lizard, you would follow them." We said, "O Allah's Apostle! (Do you mean) the Jews and the Christians?" He said, "Whom else?" See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Bayt al-afkār al-dawliyya, 1998), p. 665.

doing harm to the Prophet."[154] He then explains the meaning of twisting the tongue with the book, which includes changing the meaning of speech (*kalām*) with another or distorting it. Among examples of twisting, Riḍā alludes to Q.4:46, which has been discussed earlier, and a prophetic tradition describing the way the People of the Book greeted Muḥammad by saying "*al-sāmm 'alaykum*" (poison be on you), instead of saying "*al-salām 'alaykum*" (peace be upon you).[155]

Riḍā spends a great deal of time discussing the applicability of this twist of the tongue to Muslims. The question of scriptural distortion and twist emerges because of their corrupt belief (*fasād i'tiqādihim*) and their lack of taking hold of their scripture (*'adam istimsākihim bi-kitābihim*). "This is also what some Muslims do," Riḍā claims, "they distort the Qur'ān with their own interpretation (*ta'wīl*) in order to maintain their imitating practices (*taqālīd*) and turn away from the Qur'ān, saying that the words of Muslim scholars are enough for them."[156] Here he explicitly applies the *taḥrīf* to Muslims and accuses them of distorting the Qur'ān. One may wonder who those Muslims are in Riḍā's mind. Later on he makes it clear that he was referring to "those fanatic Muslims" (*muta'aṣṣibūn*) who reject the agenda of Muslim reformers because of "political or worldly cause, which has no relation with Islam whatsoever."[157]

Riḍā concludes his exegesis of the verse by citing 'Abduh's commentary, which provides another example of twisting the tongue. That is, that some Christians twisted what had been

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[154] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 343-344.
[155] Ibid., pp. 344-345. Both Bukhārī (d.256/870) and Muslim (d.261/875) relate this *ḥadīth* on the authority of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr that 'Ā'isha (Muhammad's wife) said: "A group of the People of the Book met the Prophet, saying '*al-sāmm 'alaykum*' (may poison be on you). I understood what they said and I responded: '*bal 'alaykum al-sāmm wa al-la'na*' (But poison and curse be upon you). The Prophet said: 'O 'Ā'isha, verily God likes tenderness in everything.' I said: 'Did you not hear what they said?' The Prophet replied: 'I said: the same to you'." See Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 1166; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1994), vol. 14, p. 371.
[156] Ibid. p. 344.
[157] Ibid.

reported of statements attributed to Jesus, such as “the son of God” or calling God “father.” For ‘Abduh, these words were to be understood figuratively, but they twisted them to denote a literal meaning. The Qur’ān accuses them of inventing a lie against God, ‘Abduh claims, because they neglected to fear God, and instead they treated their religion merely as an external formality (*rasm ẓāhir*) and spirit of partisanship (*jinsiyya*) which is the source of vanities as they felt they would be forgiven for whatever crimes they committed. Moreover, he argues that such characterizations are applicable to Muslims as well who “claim that they belong to the people of Paradise however abominable their life and behavior.”[158] These Muslims, he further argues, ascribe to Islam as a partisanship only, in spite of the fact that they are not entitled to the characteristics of true believers, but rather to the description of unbelievers and hypocrites.[159]

In contrast to ‘Abduh who understands the verse concerning a twist of the tongue to mean a distortion of the meaning of scripture, Mughniyya contends that the wording of the verse does not support ‘Abduh’s reading, because Q.3:78 speaks of a group of the People of the Book twisting words of their own imagination and claiming them as the Book of God.[160] Thus, for Mughniyya, the first mention of *kitāb* (book) in the verse is referring to a suspected book (*maz‘ūm*), and the second and third mentions of *kitāb* are the real book (*ḥaqīqī*). Based on this reading, Mughniyya asserts “they twist their tongues with the suspected book in order to lead the people to assume that that suspected book is the real, original one.”[161] In other words, the verse is not concerned with the falsification of the scripture, but rather with the writing of a book claimed to be divinely inspired.

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[158] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 345.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

As for Q.2:79, Mughniyya does not associate it with the People of the Book at all. Even the previous verse "And there are among them illiterates, who do not know the book, but desires, and they do nothing but conjecture" (2:78) is understood by Mughniyya to include all ignorant who pretend to be the people of knowledge. Although the verse was revealed on the Jews, it can certainly be understood generally because "the context does not specify the text" (*li-ann al-mawrid lā yukhaṣṣiṣu al-wārid*).[162] He then asserts that "this verse is a clear proof that the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the sunna can not be based on a mere conjecture, but one must have a sufficient knowledge of the principles of interpretation and apply them in elucidating God's words, and avoid attributing something to God and His Messenger without valid justification (*mubarrir shar'ī*)."[163] With this explanation in mind, Mughniyya considers Q.2:79 as God's warning against those who invent a lie against God and attribute to Him what is not belonging to Him in order to secure "a little price" (*thamanan qalīlan*). Mughniyya tends to understand a twist of the tongue as another form of *taḥrīf* which, for him, can manifest in many forms, including "adding words to the book or omitting something from it; and the *taḥrīf* might also take the form of changing the vowels which leads to the distortion of meaning."[164]

Ṭabaṭabā'ī offers a brief comment on the two verses. He first discusses whether the woe and condemnation in Q.2:79 "Woe to those who write the book with their hands," is addressed to "the children of Israel in general or only the interpolators among them."[165] He prefers the second possibility because the verse does not make a sweeping generalization. In the paraphrase with which Ṭabaṭabā'ī begins his treatment of Q.3:78, there is emphasis on verbal distortion. On the

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[162] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 134.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 2, pp. 93-94.
[165] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 215.

twist of the tongue, he asserts "Apparently, it means that they recite the lies which they have invented against God in the same tone and style which they use for the Book, in order to confuse the people making them believe that it was a part of the Book while it is not so."[166] Like Mughniyya, he also discusses the occurrence of the word *"kitāb"* (book) three times. For Ṭabaṭabā'ī, this repetition is intended to remove all possible ambiguity. The first *kitāb* refers to that which they wrote with their own hands and attributed to God; the second refers to the *kitāb* which was revealed by God; and the third refers to the same divine revelation. The book of God, he argues, is too precious and sublime to contain such forgeries.[167] The same was the cause of repeating the divine name "Allah," in "they say, it is from Allah, while it is not from Allah." For Ṭabaṭabā'ī, it is refutation after refutation of their ascribing their forgeries to divine revelation. With this repetition the Qur'ān emphasizes that what they claimed "is not from Allah who is the true God and who does not say except truth, as He Himself says: The truth do I speak (Q.38:84)."[168]

Concluding Remarks

From the above discussion we learn about the complexity of reformist Muslim approaches to the Qur'ānic narratives of the falsification of previous scriptures. It seems that the dichotomy between *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* (distortion in the actual text) and *taḥrīf al-ma'nā* (distortion in the meaning of a text) is too simplified an analytical tool in exploring Muslim reformers' views of the Bible. We have demonstrated that Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and Abul Kalam Azad do not problematize the reliability and veracity of the Biblical text, but rather question the faithfulness

[166] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 266.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

of some Jewish scholars in their interpretation thereof. Even scholars who adhere to the alleged distortion of the text like Riḍā and Hamka use the Biblical passages extensively, which seems to suggest a basic trust in the reliability of certain texts, to say the least. Both rely heavily upon the western higher Biblical criticism scholarship. Interestingly, the polemical writings of medieval scholars like Ibn Ḥazm are absent in their Qur'ān commentaries.

What these modern exegetes have in common is their attempt to contextualize the Qur'ānic accusation that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures to address local concerns of their own times. To make this contextualization possible these scholars avoid to a certain extent issues of specification and identification and, instead, develop some sort of generalizing discourses. They, for instance, refer the object of concealment to unqualified truth, which is not restricted to the description and information about Muḥammad. By following the general tendency of the Qur'ān in the sense that it warns against those who conceal the truth (*yaktumūna al-ḥaqq*), Muslim reformers extend this warning to the Muslims' discursive practices of concealing some aspects of their religion. In so doing, a scholar like Ṭabaṭabā'ī approaches critically and skeptically the traditions known as "occasions of revelation" which tend to clarify and delimit the scope and applicability of Qur'ānic passages. This generalization of scripture certainly functions, among others, as a useful theoretical framework to make the Qur'ān relevant to their own times and places. The Muslims, like others, assume that it is the nature of scripture as a sacred text that must be relevant to every time and place and therefore one should read it as relevant to one's own situation.

It seems that at the center of the Muslim charge of scriptural falsification is the different theory of revelation and canonization between the Muslims on the one hand, and the Jews and Christians on the other. For the Muslims in general, the Qur'ān is the word of God revealed to

Muḥammad verbatim and was written down during his lifetime. When Muḥammad passed away, it was collected either in the memory of Muslims or as a written text or a combination of both, and thus the Qur'ān is generally understood to have been canonized quite early. Canonization is the act of officially determining what is authentic and authoritative revelation to a body of scripture and what is not. This conceptualization of scripture is problematic when it is applied to both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible. Much of the contention leveled by these modern exegetes against the Bible stems from their understanding of the human involvement in the authorship of the Bible and from the late canonization and fixation of Jewish and Christian scriptures as well as the inclusion of the testimonies of earlier people into the Bible. Of course, some scholars might argue that the process of canonization of the Qur'ān, too, is much later than is supposed by the Muslim tradition,[169] but that is beyond the scope of the present chapter. The point here is that the manners of revelation in the three religions are certainly different. And these Muslim reformers fail to grasp that, for Jews and Christians, the human element in the authorship of the Bible and its late canonization do not entail corruption. The Bible obviously is not a book dictated out of heaven by God, but it seems to consider itself inspired by God and written by men.[170] In the words of Watt, "Christians regard all the books of the Bible as part of God's revelation of himself, but they tend to speak of the writers of the books, other than the

[169] John Wansbrough, for instance, argues that the canonization of the Qur'ān could not have taken place before the beginning of the third century A.H./ninth century AD. He maintains that the traditions about the 'Uthmanic recension of the Qur'ān are a later fiction designed by the emerging Muslim community in its effort to describe its origins and trace them to the Hijaz. See Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). The most elaborate criticism of Wansbrough's thesis, to the best of my knowledge, is given by Fred Donner in his *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, especially Chapter 1: The Date of the Qur'ānic Text, pp. 35-63.

[170] Speaking of revelation in both Old and New Testaments, C.P.D. Moule says: "If the Gospel, culminating in Jesus, is supremely God's self-revelation, then scripture, as the record of this mighty act of God in history, with its preparation and its accomplishment, necessarily also ranks as a medium of revelation." See Moule, "Revelation," in George Arthur Buttrick et al (eds.) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 57; see also Dan O. Via, *The Revelation of God and/as Human Reception in the New Testament* (Harrisburg: Penn: Trinity Press, 1997).

Prophets, not as having 'received revelation' but as being 'inspired', that is, as having been guided in their writing by God's spirit, the Holy Spirit."[171] Thus, if Muslims want to appreciate other peoples' scriptures they must begin with a serious engagement with the way other peoples understand their scriptures. As long as Muslims impose their theory of revelation on other scriptures the charge of the falsification of pre-Qur'ānic scriptures will remain strong.

It may be argued that the apparent ambiguity of Muslim treatment of the Bible might reflect the ambiguity of the Qur'ānic position itself. The Qur'ān seems to advocate a dialectical approach of affirmation and rejection with regard to the Jewish and Christian scriptures. On the one hand, the Torah and the Gospel are affirmed to be in harmony with the Qur'ān. Muslims are commanded to affirm their authenticity and reliability (Q.10:95; 29:46). On the other hand, Jews and Christians are criticized for not regarding their scriptures with proper esteem. They are charged with having distorted, concealed and corrupted their scriptures. Even on the question of *taḥrīf,* some passages (i.e., Q.2:75) suggest that the People of the Book commit an interpretive distortion, while others point to a written one (Q.4:46; 5:15 and 41). A scholar like Riḍā finds this ambiguity a useful theoretical framework to argue for both *taḥrīf al-ma'nā* and *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* altogether. It is intriguing to further explore whether this dialectical approach of affirmation/rejection is also present in the Qur'ān regarding the theological issues such as the question of the divinity of Jesus or the doctrine of Trinity, which will be discussed in the next chapter. As discussed earlier, Muslim reformers' discussion of the *taḥrīf* of the Bible seems to have no direct effect on their theological attitudes toward the validity of Judaism and

[171] W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today: A Contribution to Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 58.

Christianity. Even the most skeptical scholar like Riḍā, in spite of his criticism of the textual corruption of the Bible, acknowledges the salvific promise in both religions.

Chapter Four
QUR'ĀNIC DENIALS OF SONSHIP, HUMAN-DIVINITY AND TRINITY

As is well known, the Qur'ān denies the possibility of God having sons and daughters and this applies both to pagan beliefs and Christian belief about Jesus. These denials are already found in the early Meccan period when the opposition to Muḥammad came from pagans. The very short sūra 112 (al-Ikhlāṣ) offers the finest expression of the Qur'ānic theology of *tawḥīd* (monotheism) by declaring that "God did not beget, nor was He begotten" (Q.112:3). It is therefore intrinsically probable that in that period they were anti-pagan in intent rather than anti-Christian.[1] Interestingly, a recent study by Patricia Crone has successfully demonstrated that the pagans were not less monotheists than those who believe in the God of the Qur'ān.[2] In the Medinan period, however, Muḥammad encountered the resistance of Jews and Christians, rather than that of pagans. He then explained this resistance "as a resistance against the core of the prophetic message, the unity of God. This message on the unity of God, proclaimed by Jesus, had been abandoned by Christians."[3] All the sūras which contain extensive references to Jesus also include

[1] It must be pointed out that scholars differ on whether Q.112 is from the earliest Meccan period or was proclaimed only after the migration to Medina. On the one hand, T. Nöldeke and F. Schwally in *Geschichte des Qorans* (Hildesheim: G. Olans, 1970), vol.1, p. 107 place the sūra in the earlier Meccan period. Similarly, R. Blachère in *Le Coran traduction nouvelle* (Paris: Librairie orientale et americaine, 1941), vol. 1, p. 122 and R. Bell in *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953), p. 101, ascribe it to the first Meccan period. On the other hand, W. Rudolph in *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stutgart, Kahlhammer, 1922) and K. Ahrens in "Christliches im Qoran," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 84 (1930): pp. 15-68 see the polemic in Q.112 as directed against not only the paganism prevalent in Mecca but also Jesus being ascribed the status of son of God. However, there is nothing in the sūra 112 that suggests a critique of the Christians. I therefore tend to agree with Olaf Schumann who argues that Q.112 "does not evince any anti-Christian tendency, and its concise style also speaks in favor of an earlier date, to a time when Muḥammad still believed that he was propagating the same teaching as that of the *ahl al-kitāb*." See Olaf Schumann, *Jesus the Messiah in Muslim Thought* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2002), p. 11-12.
[2] Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010): pp. 151-200.
[3] Roelf S. Kuitse, "Christology in the Qur'ān," *Missiology: An International Review* 20/3 (1992): p. 365.

a denial that God has offspring. It is possible that this is because, as discussed in detail in Chapter 1, the question of the fatherhood of God was revised during the Medinan period.

Scholars offer different explanations as to why the Qur'ān vehemently rejects the notion of the sonship of Jesus. W. Montgomery Watt, for instance, argues that the reason why the Qur'ān made such denials is "because many of Muḥammad's contemporaries understood these terms literally."[4] In line with this argument, it is argued that "the emphasis on the deity of Jesus in certain Christian groups in Muḥammad's time led Muḥammad to the conclusion that Christians are giving partners to God, that Christians are not true and pure monotheists."[5] Although this view has been widely accepted by scholars and is sometimes used to explain why the Qur'ān often presents the image of Jesus in a different way from that of the Gospel, the Qur'ānic presentation of Jesus is more complex than is sometimes supposed. For Tarif Khalidi, the reason why the Qur'ānic Jesus has little in common with that of the Gospel is because he is presented in the Qur'ān as "an argument addressed to his more wayward followers, intended to convince the sincere and frighten the unrepentant."[6] Still other scholars suggest that the Qur'ānic denials of the sonship of Jesus must be interpreted "in the light of his [Muḥammad's] strict monotheism and through his experience with Arabian polytheism."[7] It seems to me that this last view gives a more creative agency to Muḥammad not merely as a collector of ideas. Whatever traditions were available to him, they all passed through his fervid religious experience and were transmuted by it. With the intention of adding more nuanced explanations to this discussion, this

[4] W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today: A Contribution to Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 135.
[5] Roelf S. Kuitse, "Christology in the Qur'ān," p. 366.
[6] Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 16.
[7] Heikki Räisänen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'ān: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar," *The Muslim World* 70 (1980), p. 130; See also Oddbjorn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 28.

chapter will explore reformist Muslim approaches to the Qur'ānic verses that criticize the theological claim that Jesus is God's son and other related issues such as his divine nature and the doctrine of the Trinity.

"Son of God"

Despite the fact that the figure "Jesus" can be less contentious for Muslims than for Jews, there remains a sharp conflict between Islam and Christianity regarding Christian claims about Jesus, which stems from the Qur'ān itself, turning on claim that he is "the son of God." David B. Burrell is correct when saying that "the Qur'ānic passages on this issue are overwhelmingly polemical in tone, and sound so utterly opposed to Christian teaching."[8] There is a strong emphasis in the Qur'ān on the mortality and servanthood of Jesus as the one who ate food and was no more than a messenger and many messengers have passed away before him (Q.5:75). He is referred to 25 times with Arabic version of his name 'Īsā,[9] out of which 16 times in conjunction with the term "ibn Maryam" (son of Mary). The frequent references in the Qur'ān to Jesus as "son of Mary" contrast with the New Testament where it is only found once (Mark 6:3)

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[8] David B. Burrell, "Trinity in Judaism and Islam," in Peter Phan (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). I would like to thank Professor Burrell for sending me his piece before it gets published in the volume mentioned above.

[9] Scholars differ on the etymology and origins of the Arabic word 'Īsā. Some argue that the ward 'Īsā is "seemingly a corruption of the Hebrew name Esau." According to this view, Muḥammad called Jesus 'Īsā either because he was confused him with Esau, the brother of Jacob, or because the Jews called Jesus "Esau" (Hebrew *ʿEsaw*) out of hatred and Muḥammad learned this name from them not realizing that it was an insult. See Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912), pp. 33-34; Geoffrey Parrinder rejects this suggestion arguing that "there is no evidence for this, and Jesus is never compared with Esau in the many volumes of the Talmud." See Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), pp. 16-17. Most scholars hold that Isa is derived from Syriac *Yeshu'* (cf. Hebrew *Yeshua'*), which originally means "Yahweh helps" but it was popularly understood to mean, "Yahweh saves." While many Muslim scholars entertain the possibility that the Qurʾānic form of Jesus' name reflects the usage of certain Christians in Muḥammad's milieu, others maintain that Isa was, in fact, the original form of Jesus' name. For a further discussion, see Neal Robinson, "Jesus," in Jane McAuliffe (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), vol. 3, pp. 7-21.

and are probably intended to reinforce the idea that he has no "divine status."[10] However, despite its emphasis on his humanity, the Qur'ān gives a special place to Jesus among the prophets of Islam (Q.2:253). His status as one who was sent to bring people to a right understanding of God is affirmed (i.e. Q.3:51; 19:36), as is the fact that Jesus was assisted in this mission by a group of followers or disciples (*hawāriyyūn*) (Q.3:52; 5:111; 61:14). What is being criticized in the Qur'ān is the Christian belief in Jesus as "Son of God."

It is worth noting that the Qur'ān never uses the word "walad" (begotten son) when it denies the sonship of Jesus,[11] in spite of the fact that in a number of verses the Qur'ān strongly rejects the notion that God adopted a son – with the Arabic term "walad" (*yattakhidu waladan*).[12] This leads scholars like Mahmoud Ayoub to argue that the Qur'ānic denials of Jesus Christ's sonship (as *walad*) should primarily be read as a rejection of the notion of divine offspring in the physical sense.[13] This argument can be pushed further by saying that "Jesus is not God's *walad* because there is no question of God having begotten him by carnal intercourse with a female consort."[14] The problem is that in sūra 9 (al-Tawba) verse 30 the term "ibn Allah" (son of God) is used, and it is quite clear that it is Christian belief about Jesus which is being repudiated:

> The Jews say, "'Uzayr (Ezra) is the Son of God," and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the Son of God." That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted (Q.9:30).

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[10] Hamid Algar argues that Jesus is consistently referred to in the Qur'ān as "Isa ibn Maryam" for two reasons: firstly, to emphasize the lack of paternity because in Arabic usage it is common always to refer to the father of a child by way of identification, not to the mother. Secondly, this style of naming us a refutation of the Christian notion that Jesus is in some sense the son of Allah. See Hamid Algar, *Jesus in the Qur'ān: His Reality Expounded in the Qur'ān* (New York: Islamic Publications International, 1999), pp. 8-9.

[11] Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (London: MacMillan Press, 1991), p. 32; Oddbjorn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 30.

[12] See, for example, Q.2:116; 4:171; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:35, 88, 91-92; 21:26: 23:91; 37:152; 39:4; 43:81.

[13] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God: A Study of the Terms *Ibn* and *Walad* in the Qur'ān and *Tafsīr* Tradition," in Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (eds.) *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville, Fl: University Press of FloRiḍā, 1995): pp. 65-81.

[14] Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 32.

In another verse, the Jews and Christians were accused of claiming the sons of God (*abnā' Allāh*) for themselves:

> The Jews and Christians say, "We are the sons of God, and His beloved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins? No; you are mortals, of His creating; He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills." For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them; to Him is the homecoming (Q.5:18)

These two verses are, undoubtedly, polemical in tone and will be the focus of our discussion. In his exegesis of Q. 9:30, Rashīd Riḍā begins with the story of 'Uzayr. He says, "This 'Uzayr is the one whom the People of the Book called Ezra."[15] In exploring the life and works of Ezra, he makes use of entries on "Ezra" from both *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (*Dā'ira al-ma'ārif al-yahūdiyya*) and *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*Dā'ira al-ma'ārif al-bariṭāniyya*) as well as the Arabic Dictionary of the Bible (*Qāmūs al-kitāb al-muqaddas*) written by Dr. George Edward Post.[16] With the help of these voluminous works, it is hardly surprising that Riḍā spends great deal in discussing Ezra's life and contribution to the Jewish tradition. His main purpose, however, is not only to show Ezra's great contributions, but more importantly to make sense of why the Jews called him "the son of God."

From *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Riḍā learns that Ezra was so zealous in spreading the Torah, that rabbis said of him, "If Moses had not anticipated him, Ezra would have received the Torah." He restored and reestablished the Torah that had been almost completely forgotten.[17] Among his major contributions mentioned by Riḍā is that Ezra ordained that public readings

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[15] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: Dar al-Manār, 1947), vol. 10, p. 378.
[16] This last work was referred to frequently by Riḍā in its Arabic version. As for the two encyclopaedias, it seems that Riḍā read the original version, not only because they had not been translated into Arabic, but also because Riḍā himself called the English edition, *Dā'ira al-ma'ārif al-yahūdiyya al-inglīziyya*.
[17] "*Fa-qad kānat nusiya wa-lākin 'izrā a'ādahā wa-aḥyāha*." See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 10, pp. 378-379; cf. David Marcus et al. "Ezra" in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan, 2nd ed., 2007), vol. 6, p. 655.

from the Torah take place not only on Sabbaths, but also on Mondays and Thursdays. He had the Torah rewritten in Assyrian characters (*bi-ḥurūf asyūriyya*). Riḍā also makes mention of several findings from *Qāmūs al-kitāb al-muqaddas*, namely: (1) The settling of the canon of scripture and restoring, correcting, and editing the whole sacred volume according to the threefold arrangement of the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa; (2) the institution of the Great Synagogue (*al-majma' al-kabīr*); (3) the introduction of the Chaldee characters (*ahruf kildāniyya*) instead of the old Hebrew; and (4) the authorship of the books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and, some add, Esther.[18] With this account, Riḍā attempts to accomplish two purposes. The first is to show that "the People of Book were deeply indebted to Ezra in maintaining their religion and recovering their scriptures." The second point that Riḍā wanted to make is that the Torah and other books had once been lost or burned, and Ezra had not only recovered them but also made some other changes.[19] He then concludes that the Jews were and are still sanctifying him to the extent that some of them called him son of God. Riḍā is quick to note that "we don't know whether this title was given to express a special appreciation (*ma'nā al-takrīm*) to him or more than that."[20]

It seems that Riḍā attempts to avoid the charge that the Qur'ān contains inaccuracies, as it is well known that the Jews do not worship 'Uzayr. He does not accuse the Jews of worshiping a human being and even tries to minimize the importance of the Jewish claim that Ezra is son of God. As for the group of Jews who said such a statement, Riḍā simply asserts "some Jews of Medina" (*ba'ḍ yahūd al-madīna*). He then relates a story about a group of Jews who came to the Prophet and said: "How could we follow you while you have left our *qibla* (direction of prayer)

[18] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 10, p. 379.
[19] Ibid., pp. 382-383.
[20] Ibid., p. 383.

and you do not claim that ‘Uzayr is the son of God?”[21] While he accepts as authentic the report about the Prophet’s encounter with this group of Jews and what they have said, Riḍā calls into question the detail story about Ezra restoring the lost Torah reported by Ibn Isḥāq and Ṭabarī, which he categorizes as a part of *isrā’īliyyāt*. He claims that story as originating from Ka‘b al-Akhbār.[22] The earlier Qur’ān commentators cited that story, according to Riḍā, “because they did not read the Old Testament and the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, and other books about their histories, let alone the works of European scholars and historians which were not available in their time.”[23]

As expected, Riḍā treats extensively the second part of the Qur’ānic verse that deals with the Christian claim that the Messiah is the son of God (*wa-qālat al-naṣārā al-masīḥ ibn Allāh*). He spends up to 40 pages discussing several issues, including a section he titles “The Christianity of Europe and Why They do not Embrace Islam” (*Naṣrāniyya al-ifrange wa-limādhā lā-yuslimūn?*). He first admits the complexity of the term “son of God” especially when it is understood within the realm of Trinitarian doctrine. “Much of the talks about this issue,” Riḍā asserts, “do not add anything but confusion and obscurity.”[24] The crux of the matter, according to Riḍā, is that Christians understand the term literally (*ḥarfiyan*) in the sense of physical begetting when it applies to Jesus and figuratively (*majāziyan*) when it applies to others. Here he refers to Q.5:18 mentioned above in which the word *abnā’ Allāh* (sons of God) is applied to Jews and Christians. He also refers to several passages from the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospels. Riḍā does not question the use of “son of God” since the term had long been understood

[21] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 10, p. 384.
[22] Ibid., p. 384.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 389.

figuratively in the history of religions. What he sees as problematic is that "the Christians departed from the rules of reason and languages (*qawānīn al-ʻaql wa- lughāt*) by applying it literally to the Messiah alone and figuratively to others."[25] One may problematize Riḍā's insistence that Christians understand the Messiah as "the son of God" literally. What does he mean by the literal meaning of "son of God"? For Christians, the term has a soteriological meaning: the 'Son of God' frees us to become 'sons of God.'[26] As one Christian author, Colin Chapman, puts it, "We don't believe that Jesus was the son of God in any physical sense, this idea is repugnant to us as it is to Muslims."[27]

Riḍā's main objection to the sonship of Jesus is twofold. Firstly, the Christians misunderstood their scriptures by ascribing the physical conception of fatherhood to God. For him, the word *ibn* is used metaphorically (*majāziyan*) in the Gospel to express a relationship of love and intimacy. He criticizes the way Christian authors justify that God has a physical son, and that Jesus is the only son of God. George E. Post and the Egyptian Christian thinker Butrus al-Bustānī are cited extensively because they both differentiate in a striking way between calling God "my Father" (Jesus's statement) and "our Father" (his disciples' statement). The distinction between "my Father" and "our Father" is generally understood to indicate a special relationship of Jesus to God.[28] Riḍā problematizes this differentiation arguing that the reason for the use of singular and plural pronouns can easily be understood, namely, the plural for a group and the singular for an individual. For the sake of discussion, even if we accept that the use of "my Father" entails a special relationship, Riḍā argues that this special relationship contradicts

[25] Ibid.
[26] For a further discussion on this, see Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).
[27] Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downers Grove: Il: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 184.
[28] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, p. 391.

David's claim in Psalm 89:26 in which he cries unto God: "You are my Father, my God." He further argues that if the use of the singular pronoun (my Father) by the speaker indicates a physical sonship then the title must be given to David prior to the Messiah.[29] For Riḍā, the physical fatherhood of God does contradict reason and therefore must be understood metaphorically to mean God's mercy (*raḥma*), intimacy (*ra'fa*) and honor (*takrīm*). He, however, admits that "We do not deny that Jesus deserves the highest level of intimacy compared with others such as Jacob, David and Solomon to whom the title [of the son of God] has been given in the Old Testament."[30]

Secondly, related to the last point, there is a strong emphasis in Riḍā's argument on the lack of rational and textual supports for the Christian claim of the divinity of Jesus. For him, reason only allows us to understand the term "son/s of God" in metaphorical sense (*ma'nā majāzī*). What can be understood from the frequent references of special status (*imtiyāz*) to Jesus in the texts of the New Testament, according to Riḍā, is that "he was more distinguished (*afḍal*) than others, and the Muslims do not deny this specialty as they appraise him more than his predecessors such as Israel, David and others who had been called "son of God" as well in the Old Testament."[31] In critiquing the Christian understanding of "son of God" as exemplified in Post's *Qāmūs al-kitāb al-muqaddas* and al-Bustāmī's *Dā'ira al-ma'ārif al-'arabiyya*, Riḍā makes some quite strident comments on the matter, in which the words "illogical" and "irrational" feature prominently. One may ask whether thinking about theological issues should always resonate with reason. Are there not limits to what we can understand theologically? Thus, the emphasis on reason alone seems to be problematic in explaining the nature of the sonship of

[29] Ibid., p. 395.
[30] Ibid., pp. 394-395.
[31] Ibid., p. 396.

Jesus. The Catholic theologian Karl Barth explains this doctrine in terms of "mystery," arguing that the divine sonship of Jesus is "an inconceivable mystery" and "intended to be acknowledged as such."[32]

Unlike Riḍā, the Syrian commentator Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī does not delve into the question of the divinity of Jesus, saying that such a belief is well-known (*mashhūr ma'lūm*). In his explication of Q.9:30, he rather attempts to make sense of why the Qur'ān accuses the Jews of claiming that 'Uzayr is the son of God. "As for the Jews," he says, "it was the ignorant of them who uttered such a statement, whereas the rest simply regarded him with high esteem and considered him at the same level as that of Moses. They always mentioned his name and believed that God had trusted him to collect the scattered Torah and renew the Mosaic religion, return it to its pristine moment, and reform the corrupted manners and customs through divine inspiration (*bi-ilhām*)."[33] Qāsimī does not elaborate why the Qur'ān generalizes its accusation to all Jews, except that he simply says that the ignorance among Jews were so widespread. His discussion of Ezra's contributions accords with what Riḍā has discussed at length above. For Qāsimī, it was because of this great work that the Jews gave him that designation, which is a rather daring statement. However, he concludes, "should they intend with that designation in metaphorical sense, that would not lead them to disbelief. Thus, one should be careful in making a statement that could be understood as negating the greatness of God, and avoid such a statement in any circumstances."[34]

In a similar fashion, in his interpretation of Q.5:18, Qāsimī affirms that the phrase "son/sons of God" has been used in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. He cites the medieval

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[32] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 1956), vol. 1, p. 202.
[33] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Īsā al-bābī al-ḥalabī, 1957), vol. 8, p. 3120.
[34] Ibid., p. 3121.

mufassir Ibn Kathīr who said: “They [the Jews] narrated from their scriptures that God said to Isrā’īl (Jacob): ‘You are My son.’ They interpreted it literally. However, this literal interpretation has been rejected by those who had accepted Islam, saying that statement was intended as an honor and regard.”[35] Likewise, when it is said in the Christian scripture that Jesus called God “my father and your father,” it is meant “my God and your God.” Qāsimī argues that none of Jesus’ disciples claimed the divine sonship for themselves that they claimed for Jesus.[36] At the end of his discussion of the verse, Qāsimī cites the eighteenth-century Indian reformer Shah Waliullah al-Dahlawī who says that God has honored the Prophets and their followers in each religion with the designation of the beloved one (*bi-laqab al-maḥbūb*). But the Jews thought that honor is specifically applicable to them because of their Jewish-Hebrew-Israeli identity. They did not recognize that such an honor in fact depends on obedience and submission to God’s will.[37]

Abul Kalam Azad also does not problematize the very idea of “son of God,” but rather delves into the basic assumption underlying the Qur’ānic denials of the divinity of Christ. He simply says that the Qur’ān denies divinity of Christ because “the belief in the divinity of a human being is repugnant to the very concept of *tawḥīd* (unity of God).”[38] The Indian Muslim reformer’s understanding of Jesus calling God “Father” is interesting, because it is understood as the way the Christ replaced the Judaic concept of God as “God of terror” by “God of love.” In his preaching of the religion of love, Azad argues, Jesus emphasized that ritual and formality were of no consequence in religion, if they did not denote goodness and goodwill towards others.

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[35] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 1923.
[36] Ibid., p. 1920.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman al-Qur’ān* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967) vol.2, p. 157.

The problem as he sees it is that "the followers of Christ took undue advantage of his description of God. They asserted that faith in the atonement of Christ guaranteed their redemption, and so they thought that in as much as God was their 'Father,' He would never close the door to the kingdom of Heaven for them, His own children."[39] In this context, he relates his interpretation of Q.9:30 to Q.5:18 in which Jews and Christians claim "sons of God" for themselves.

While Azad does not say much about Q.9:30, his exegesis of Q.5:18 turns away from the discussion of strict monotheism that has preoccupied many scholars, including Riḍā, to the problem of salvation. According to Azad, Jews and Christians entertain an erroneous belief that they are the children of God and that despite all the wrong they might do, they are sure to attain salvation. The Qur'ān replies to this vain assertion. It states emphatically that God never gave to any particular community a free passport to Heaven. It also states that the Jews and Christians are human beings as others, and that the grant of salvation lies entirely with God.[40]

The Indonesian scholar Hamka discusses the context of the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of Q.5:18, which neither Riḍā nor Azad allude to. Referring to the report on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās as related by Ibn Isḥāq, Ṭabarī and others, Hamka asserts that a group of Jewish leaders, namely Ibn 'Ubay, Bahrī ibn Amr and Shāsh ibn 'Addī, came to the Prophet and had some conversation with him. Muḥammad is reported to have invited them to follow the right path and warned them of a severe punishment if they did not accept the truth. They responded: "What are you threatening us with, O Muḥammad! We, by God, are the sons of God and His beloved ones!" According to Ibn 'Abbās, it was not long after that the verse was revealed.[41]

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[39] Ibid., p. 288.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 175.

Interestingly, Hamka does not only attempt to find the context of revelation by referring to the medieval Muslim sources, he also traces the use the phrase "son/s of God" in the New Testament. Hamka claims that the Qur'ān indeed affirms that Jews and Christians did say it. "Those passages from the scriptures in the possession of Jews and Christians," Hamka claims, "indicate God's love for those who live according to the will of God."[42] The Qur'ān asserts that the Jews and Christians often called themselves "children of God" and "His beloved one" as a symbol of self-pride, which eventually led them to see themselves as the most distinguished people on earth. Thus the Prophet was asked to reject such an arrogant claim: "Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins?'" (Q.5:18). Hamka argues that the title "son/s of God" was an honor given to earlier prophets for their extraordinary good deeds. They, for instance, endeavored to build peace among people (*suka mendamaikan*). As such, the award of a certain honorary title should be understood within its own historical context in the past. He further asserts that the Qur'ān does not use the title "son/s of God" anymore because it has often been misused by many to express an inappropriate self-pride. In his own words, "In Islam, in stead of *ab* (which means "father") God is often called *rabb*, which means educator, guardian, and sustainer, whereas human beings are called *'abd* (servant) instead of *ibn* (son)."[43]

Like Azad, Hamka understands Q.5:18 as the Qur'ānic refutation of any sort of exclusionary attitudes toward salvation. The key phrase on this matter is "He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills," which is repeated several times in the Qur'ān. One may understand this phrase to mean that God could choose arbitrarily whom He likes to forgive or to punish. Some even argue that this phrase teaches the doctrine of fatalistic predetermination. For

[42] Ibid., p. 177. Some of the Biblical passages cited by Hamka are Matthew 5:9 and 48; 6:1, 9, 14-15; John 8:43-45.
[43] Ibid., p. 179.

Hamka, both are wrong because we are here talking from the perspective of human beings who have no knowledge of God's will. In addition, there are other verses in the Qur'ān that seem to advocate the so-called "free will" doctrine. According to Hamka, the general principle underlying God's rewards and punishment is the good deed and the evil deed. Thus, this Qur'ānic phrase must be understood to mean that "all human beings are equal and God will not discriminate against mankind based on race or skin color. No nation or tribe could claim privilege over others. What distinguishes one person from another is his/her deeds and devotions to God."[44]

With this reflection, Hamka pushes the issue even further to remind his fellow Muslims about the danger of feeling superior over other people. He argues that there are some phrases in the Qur'ān that could mislead the Muslims in such a way that they feel like Jews and Christians who claimed as "the children of God and His beloved ones." One of such phrases is Q.3:110: "You are the best community ever brought forth to people." If this phrase is understood in isolation from the rest of the verse, it will engender the feeling of self-pride and arrogance. The fact of the matter is that the next phrase gives the necessary condition of the Muslims to be the best community (*khayr umma*), namely, the task of commanding right and forbidding wrong. "How could one attain the title of '*khayr umma*' if the necessary conditions are not met," Hamka asserts.[45]

Furthermore, the Qur'ān also refers to the Muslims as "*umma wasaṭ*" (Q.2:143) which can be translated as "a just balanced community." According to Hamka, some Qur'ān commentators hold that this designation has been adopted by Muslims because Islam represents

[44] Ibid., p. 178.
[45] Ibid., p. 179.

"a middle way" between the excessive legalism of Judaism and the excessive otherworldliness of Christianity. Others argue that the Muslims are witnesses over all other communities.[46] At any rate, this designation has been adopted by Muslims both as an indication of divinely conferred distinction upon them and a divine mandate to avoid extremes in one's belief and conduct. Such an ideal community is generally understood by Muslims to be a model for the whole to emulate.[47] Hamka cautions, however, "that even this verse could become an empty pride in the sense of vainglory, unjustified by one's own achievements and actions, but sought by pretense and appeals to superficial characteristics, if the very condition of justice and moderation is not met."[48] Back to Q.5:18, Hamka believes that the verse could be considered as "a mirror" in which Muslims should see themselves.

The two Shī'ī scholars Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabatabā'ī and Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya also consider Q.5:18 as the Qur'ānic response to the Jewish and Christian exclusive claim of having the Divine favor. Ṭabatabā'ī expresses his skeptical attitude to the historicity of the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of the verses as reported by earlier exegetes to which Hamka refers above. Such a report, like most of the narratives giving theoretical reasons, "is mere attempt to fit some occurrences on a verse, and then claiming that it was revealed for that reason."[49] Ṭabatabā'ī believes that Jews and Christians neither claim real sonship nor put

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[46] Ibid.

[47] It should be noted that while the righteous Muslims are called "*umma wasaṭ*" (Q.2:143), the Qur'ān also describes righteous Jews and Christians as "*umma maqtasida*" (Q.5:66), which can also be translated as "balanced or moderate community." Taken together, as Asma Asfarudin argues, "these verses clearly suggest that it is subscription to some common standard of righteousness and ethical conduct that determines the salvific nature of a religious community and not the denominational label it chooses to wear." See Asma Asfaruddin, "The Hermeneutics of Inter-faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Qur'ānic Exegeses," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37/2 (2009), p. 331.

[48] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p. 179.

[49] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-a'lāmi lil-maṭbū'āt, 1980), vol. 6, p. 285.

forward this claim in the literal sense. They called themselves sons of God metaphorically as a mark of distinction, because there are a lot of people in their scripture who have been called sons of God, such as Adam, Jacob, David, and good-doing believers. Here the Qur'ān refutes the Jewish and Christian claims of exclusionary relation and belovedness with God and their conviction that they would never be chastised and punished. Ṭabatabā'ī notices two Qur'ānic responses to this exclusive claim of a special relationship with God. The first contradicts their claim, pointing to the chastisements that were inflicted on them, as in the Qur'ānic statement: "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" (Q.5:18). The second argument looks at the reality that they are merely mortal beings from among the creatures of God, as the Qur'ān says: "No; you are mortals, of His creating; He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills" (Q.5:18). Ṭabatabā'ī paraphrases this by saying "They have no superiority in this matter over other creatures. Any distinction or nobility or other things one has cannot stop God from forgiving him or punishing him as He wishes."[50]

They cannot say that misfortunes and calamities that afflict them are in fact manifestation of Divine love, but when such things afflict others they call them Divine punishment. Ṭabatabā'ī is quick to note, however, that misfortunes, disasters and calamities afflict the believers and disbelievers alike, and they catch the good-doers and evil-doers in similar way. No one has any badge of honor against God, nor can anyone arbitrarily claim any right on God. The Qur'ān never said that the Muslims had any special honor before God nor has it called them sons of God and His beloved ones. In fact, Ṭabatabā'ī concludes, "the Qur'ān does not care about the names and the titles, which people have taken for themselves."[51]

[50] Ibid., p. 252.
[51] Ibid., p. 251.

In a similar manner, Mughniyya understands Q.9:30 as referring to the Jewish and Christian claim of an exclusive salvation similar to what the Qur'ān has said of them in Q.2: 111: "They say, 'None shall enter Paradise except that they be Jews or Christians'." He reminds the reader of the Islamic doctrine which states that "All people are equal in God's eyes and no one could claim superiority over another except with *taqwā* (fear of God). The mere utterance with the word "*islām*" would have no effect except through the good deed (*'amal ṣāliḥ*)."[52]

As for the exegesis of Q.9:30, both Ṭabatabā'ī and Mughniyya identify 'Uzayr with Ezra. However, they have some difficulty in understanding the Qur'ānic assertion that Jews claimed 'Uzayr as the son of God. They seem to downplay the importance of this verse. Ṭabaṭabā'ī, for instance, offers a brief explanation as to why the Qur'ān makes such an assertion. He admits that at the time of the Prophet only a few Jews claimed that 'Uzayr was son of God, but such a statement was attributed to all because the claim was not rejected by other groups of Jews.[53] Ṭabatabā'ī does not identify who these few Jews were. Instead, in his discussion of transmitted materials (*baḥth rīwā'ī*) he mentions a prophetic tradition that juxtaposes the faulty claim of Jews and Christians with that of those Muslims who do harm to the Prophet and his family (*ahl al-bayt*). It has been narrated from the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī that the Prophet said: "God's wrath is stronger for Jews who said ''Uzayr is the son of God'; God's wrath is stronger for Christians who said 'the Messiah is the son of God'; and God's wrath is stronger for whoever

[52] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 6, p. 39.
[53] Ṭabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 10, p. 244.

poured my blood and harmed my progeny."[54] Ṭabatabā'ī claims that this tradition is transmitted by both Shī'ī and Sunnī authors.[55]

Mughniyya is also aware that no Jews in his time call 'Uzayr "son of God," and he therefore argues that "At any rate (*'alā ayyati ḥāl*), the Prophet encountered the Jews of his time with this verse. What has been reported that some of them rejected the Prophet because he did not affirm what they said about 'Uzayr indicates that at the time they believed in the sonship of 'Uzayr."[56] As for the sonship of Jesus, Mughniyya simply asserts that the question has been dealt with in his exegesis of Q.5:17, a verse that will be discussed in the next section.

The Divine Nature of Jesus

Q.5:17 along with 5:72 have generally been understood to deny the divinity of Jesus. Both verses begin with the phrase *"la-qad kafara al-ladhīnā qālū inna Allāh huwa al-Masīḥ ibn Maryam* (They disbelieve who say "God is the Messiah, the son of Mary)." The Qur'ānic use of the harsh word *kufr* (deliberate truth-concealing) for those who believe in the divinity of Jesus should be understood within the context of a Qur'ānic milieu. We need to remember something of the background to the Qur'ānic denial of Jesus' divinity. The Prophet's mission was to preach God's oneness to the Arabs who used to associate many gods with the supreme God. The unforgivable sin according to the Qur'ān is to include created beings in the worship. It is against this background that we must understand the criticisms that were aimed at the Christians. In the Qur'ānic perspective, those who believe in the divinity of Jesus are at risk of undermining the oneness of God.

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[54] Ibid., p. 254.
[55] Ṭabatabā'ī singles out two well-known *tafsīr*s written by Shī'ī and Sunnī scholars that mention this tradition, namely, *Tafsīr al-'iyāshī* (Shī'ī) and *al-Durr al-manthūr* by al-Suyūṭī (Sunnī).
[56] Ibid., vol. 10, p. 33.

For Muslims in general, the Messiah cannot be God because no one could share divinity with God, which is antithetical to the very concept of *tawḥīd*. Even for scholars like Riḍā who vehemently reject the physical concept of sonship, his underlying assumption is that to accept Jesus as the son of God would be tantamount to denying the fundamental and all-pervading Qur'ānic message of the unity and transcendence of God. Jesus himself is presented in the Qur'ān as denying the claim to divinity (Q.5:116). In other words, the Qur'ānic denial of the sonship of Jesus becomes something of the background to its denial of his divinity.

Some Western scholars ridicule the Qur'ānic understanding of the divinity of Jesus, because the phrase "God is the Messiah" is alien even to the Christian scriptures. However, they differ on which form of Christianity Muḥammad actually encountered, either Monophysites or Nestorians. The position of Monophysite and Nestorian Christians on Jesus can be summarized as follows. Monophysites believed that Jesus had one nature, which was more divine than human. On the other hand, Nestorians believed that Jesus had two natures: human and divine, which were associated but not united. These Arab Christians were seen as heretical by the Byzantine Empire, whose doctrine was defined by the Chalcedonian Council (451), namely, that "Jesus Christ is one and the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man… one and the same Christ in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."[57] The German scholar Günter Risse titled his book with the Qur'ānic phrase, *'Gott ist Christus, der Sohn der Maria'* (1989), and argued that the Qur'ānic rejection is addressed to an extreme Monophysite Christology that not only attributes divine nature to Christ, but identifies God with Christ. Risse tries to show how Monophysite Christology prevailed in the Christian surroundings of Muḥammad and thus constituted the main

[57] Cited by W.H.C Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 771.

polemical context of the Qur'ānic denials of the divinity of Jesus.[58] Other scholars like Geoffrey Parrinder argue for the influence of the Nestorian Christology.[59] Claus Schedl has also recently "drawn attention to a Nestorian text which provides a precedent for the Qur'ān's insistence that those say God is the Messiah are unbelievers (5:17)."[60] However, as Neal Robinson puts it, "these explanations are plausible but they are not conclusive."[61] For Olaf Schumann,

> [Muḥammad] was not concerned with the Monophysite absorption of one nature by the other, nor with the Nestorian emphasis on the inseparability of the two still different natures, nor Chalcedonian Orthodoxy's rejection of both views. Rather, he was concerned about preserving the unbreachable distance separating God and humanity: God is the One and Only and relates to the creation and all that is in it as its Creator and Lord.[62]

The Muslim conventional argument is that God's absolute monotheism cannot be compromised at any cost, because any attempt to place other beings alongside God and then venerate them as equal to God is considered as a *shirk* (associationism, polytheism), which is the only unforgivable sin in Islam (Q.4:116). To ascribe divinity to Jesus, or any other person, is to associate (*ashraka*) something in the created order with the uncreated deity in a way that attempts to divide God's oneness. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why Muslim reformers examined in this dissertation are reluctant to concede to the Christian doctrines of the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity.

Qāsimī, for instance, pays special attention to the opening phrase of Q.5:17 and 72: "They disbelieve who say "God is the Messiah, the son of Mary." His discussion is intended to answer two questions: What does the phrase mean? And who did say so? To anticipate his

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[58] Gunter Risse, *'Gott ist Christus, der Sohn der Maria': Eine Studie zum Christusbild im Koran* (Bonn: Borengässer, 1989).
[59] Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān,* p. 63.
[60] Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 20; cf. Claus Schedl, *Muḥammad und Jesus: Die Christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans neu übersetzt und erklärt* (Vienna: Herder, 1978).
[61] Neal Robinson, "Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Jesus in the Qur'ān," in Andrew Linzey and Peter Wexler (eds.) *Fundamentalism and Tolerance* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991), p. 97.
[62] Schumann, *Jesus the Messiah in Muslim Thought,* p. 6.

conclusion: he says that the Qur'ān claims that the Christians identify God with the Messiah – although they do not explicitly say so – because that is the consequence of their belief. He refers to the medieval *mufassir* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī who explains the three persons (Arabic: *aqānīm*) of the Trinity in terms of union (*ittiḥād*). Rāzī explains the Christian belief as follows: "One essence in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; these three are One just as the Sun is disc, light and heat. They (Christians) refer to the Father as the Substance (*dhāt*), to the Son as the Word (*kalima*) and to the Spirit as the Life (*ḥayāt*)…. They claim that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God, and all are one God."[63] According to one Christian author, Chawkat Moucarry, Rāzī's explanation, especially the last one, is "a fair description of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity."[64]

Qāsimī cites Rāzī's observation, however, he notes that the verse may in fact refer to a group (*qawm*) of Christians who said that the reality of God is the Messiah and no other (*ḥaqīqa Allāh huwa al-Masīḥ lā-ghayr*). But who is this group? He also cites other sources, including Zamakhsharī who says: "Among the Christians there were people who said that." While Shahrastānī (d.548/1153) in his *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* refers to the Jacobites, Māwardī (d.450/1058) in his *A'lām al-nubuwwa* asserts that "The early Nestorians said that Jesus is God."[65] It is common among earlier Qur'ān *mufassirūn* to classify three main groups when talking about the Christian sects. In his commentary on Q.19:37, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān asserts that "the Christians were divided into three groups over Jesus: the Nestorians said that he is God's son, the Jacobites (*ya'qūbiyya*) that he is God, and the Melkites (*milkāniyya*) 'God the

[63] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf*, verse 5:73.
[64] Chawkat Moucarry, *Faith to Faith: Christianity and Islam in Dialogue* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), p. 186.
[65] Ibid., p. 1922.

third of three' (Q.5:73)."[66] Ṭabarī also mentions these three groups when talking about Christianity.[67] Nevertheless, one may notice here that none of the above Christian sects did in fact claim the same phrase as that of the Qur'ān: "God is the Messiah."

Rashīd Riḍā calls into question the earlier *mufassirūn*'s description of the divinity of Jesus. The medieval *mufassir* al-Bayḍāwī (d.685/1286) is cited by Riḍā to have understood it as "union" (*ittiḥād*), while Rāzī argued that the Qur'ānic phrase "God is the Messiah" is based on the Christian doctrine of incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), which is necessary for the Christian belief even though they do not explicitly say it. Riḍā explains further that other scholars attribute such a statement to the Jacobites.[68] What seems problematic for Riḍā is that some of the earlier *mufassirūn* such as Zamakhsharī, Bayḍāwī and Rāzī, as cited by Qāsimī, offer an explanation of the Christian doctrine that does not negate the unity of God (*la-yunāfī waḥdāniyya al-khāliq*), that is, by understanding the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as "existence (*wujūd*), knowledge (*'ilm*) and life (*hayāt*)."[69] Riḍā accuses Rāzī and other earlier *mufassirūn* of not having read the Christian scriptures nor having conversation with them about their belief (*lam yaqra'ū kutubahum wa-lam yunāẓirūhum*). He argues that "it is valid to say that monotheism (*tawḥīd*) is explicit in the New Testament, while the Trinity (*tathlīth*) is only implicit. The doctrine that Christian priests preach and the statement about the divinity of Jesus are not found in the New Testament. Rather, there are some passages that they try to interpret them to suit their purpose."[70]

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[66] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaymān*, ed. Dr. Abdullah Mahmūd Shahhāta, (Cairo: al-Hay ah al-Misriyya al-'āmma li al-kitāb, 1979), vol. 2, p. 628.
[67] For a discussion on Ṭabarī's view, see Abdelmajid Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'ān Commentary of Tabari," *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): pp. 105-148.
[68] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 307.
[69] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, p. 307.
[70] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, pp. 308-209.

Therefore, Riḍā attempts to prove that the divinity of Jesus is an extra-Biblical creed. He begins by addressing the first passage of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Riḍā problematizes the general understanding of the Word as the Messiah. His explanation, however, is a somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, he tries to justify the Qur'ānic assertion that the Christians say "God is the Messiah" by referring to the last phrase of the Gospel of John. By reversing "the Word was God" with "God was the Word" (*Allah huwa al-kalima*), Riḍā claims that the Gospel of John affirms that God is the Messiah. Thus he dismisses the possibility that the Qur'ān was influenced by heretical sects. On the other hand, he refers to the work of George E. Post to argue that the understanding of the Word as the Messiah is the invention of John. Post is cited to have said: "The intended meaning of the Word is the Messiah, however, the word has never been used for that meaning except in the works of John. The philosopher Philo of Alexandria understood the Word in a different way from that of John."[71] Furthermore, Riḍā also argues that John wrote his Gospel only at the end of his life because of the suggestion and insistence of other people. He then concludes:

> It is evident that this doctrine [of the divine nature of Jesus] was not taught by the Messiah himself in his own words, nor was it preached by his disciples who spread all over the country to call [people] to his Gospel. If it is correct that John wrote the Gospel under his name, then it means that the doctrine was known only in the last decade of the first century when his Gospel was written. It does not make sense that the Messiah and all his disciples were silent about the doctrine, which is later on claimed by Christians as the foundation of the religion (*aṣl al-dīn*).[72]

One may question Riḍā's assertion that the identification of the Word with Jesus is John's own idea, and therefore it is not valid. As is well known, the Qur'ān itself testifies that Jesus is "a

[71] Ibid., p. 309.
[72] Ibid.

Word from God" (Q.3:42) or "God's Word" (Q.4:171). Of course, both classical and modern Qur'ān exegetes have recorded different interpretations of the meaning of Jesus as "God's Word," which have been summarized by Barbara Freyer Stowasser as follows: (1) God's creative power and His act of creation of Jesus, (2) "Word" indicates the Gospel, the essence of Jesus' prophetic mission, (3) Jesus himself is figuratively referred to as "God's Word" in order to define his mission, which is to clarify God's message to the world and cleanse the record of past revelation from distortion, and (4) the "Word" means God's message to Mary about the birth of Jesus.[73] One should not fail to notice here that the title given to Jesus in the Qur'ān does not have the same meaning as the same title given in the Gospels. Christians in general believe that Jesus is the Word of God in the sense that he is the incarnation of the eternal Word of God, the personified revelation of God. Jesus is God's Word in a way that is, to some degree, similar to the way Muslims consider the Qur'ān to be God's word. To make a further useful comparison, it can be said that "For Christians, God's eternal Word is revealed in the person of Jesus, whereas for Muslims it is revealed in the Qur'ān."[74]

Hamka begins his interpretation of Q.5:17 from the point where Riḍā ends his discussion on the divinity of Jesus, that is, the first passage of the Gospel of John. However, instead of reinforcing his argument by referring to George E. Post's *Qāmūs al-kitāb al-muqaddas* as Riḍā frequently does, Hamka cites John Peterson-Smyth's *A People's Life of Christ,* which was translated into Arabic by the Egyptian Coptic Ḥabīb Sa'īd.[75] In this book, Peterson-Smyth writes that during Jesus' life time the question of the divinity of Jesus was never thought of amongst the

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[73] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 76-77.
[74] Chawkat Moucarry, *Faith to Faith: Christianity and Islam in Dialogue*, 175.
[75] Peterson-Smyth's *A People's Life of Christ* was first published in 1920 by Fleming H. Revell Company, New York. The book was translated into Arabic by Ḥabīb Sa'īd under the title "*Ḥayāt Yasū'*" that I was able to access only the third edition published by Dār al-thaqāfa in Egypt in 1977.

disciples. He was always perceived by his disciples as a man. But it was not until after the Resurrection that Jesus was regarded as God.[76] By this reference Hamka wanted to argue that the divinity of Jesus was developed later especially by St. John. He continues, “In the Old Testament which is considered by Christian leaders as the basis for prophecizing Jesus there was nothing that could be brought up to support the divinity of Jesus.”[77]

To support his view, Hamka quotes Q.5:72 in which the Qur’ānic Jesus is mentioned to have said: “O Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord!” In this verse, he argues, the Qur’ān once again warns Christians against their fault belief, and reminds them of what Jesus himself had said to his people. The Qur’ānic Messiah goes on to say: “Verily whoever associates with God anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers” (Q.5:72). Although the verse uses the word “*yushrik*,” Hamka avoids accusing Christians of being *mushrikūn*. Instead, he says that “ascribing any partner to God, including associating Jesus with God, is an act of *ẓulm* (wrong-doing, injustice).”[78] He then explains the meaning of *ẓulm*, which literally means “darkness.” They commit *ẓulm* to themselves and to the Messiah by making up what the latter had not preached. And the verse goes on, “For those wrongdoers (*ẓālimūn*) [in the Day of Judgment] there would be no helpers.”

Like his exegesis on other verses, here Hamka also attempts to generalize the Qur’ānic discourse by claiming that this warning does in fact apply to all people, not only to Christians who believe in the divinity of Jesus, but also to those who regard their “Holy men” (“*Orang*

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[76] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 170; cf. John Peterson-Smyth, *A People’s Life of Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920), pp. 48-50.
[77] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, p. 170.
[78] Ibid., p. 305.

Suci") and priests like God, venerate them and ask them for blessing (*berkat*) and intercession (*syafa'at*). Moreover, Hamka asserts that the warning also applies to the Muslims who venerate the so-called "saints" (*wali*) and "sacred" places (*tempat keramat*) by asking them to give blessing, instead of asking God. Whereas in the Day of Judgment those saints and sacred places would not be able to offer them any help.[79]

The tendency to contrast the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus with strict monotheism and to separate the Christian belief from that of the Messiah is also prevalent among Shī'ī scholars. Ṭabatabā'ī, for instance, argues that by believing in the divine nature of Jesus the Christians did not believe in the oneness of God in true sense. For a reason that is not entirely clear to me, Ṭabatabā'ī does not fully address this question in his interpretation of Q.5:17 and 72 as other scholars do, but rather in his long commentary on Q.3:79: "It is not conceivable that a man, to whom is given the Book, and wisdom, and prophethood, should say to people: 'Be my servants rather than God's': on the contrary (he would say) 'Be worshippers of God because of your teaching the Book and your readings [it yourselves].'" In interpreting this verse, Ṭabatabā'ī spends more than 50 pages discussing various issues under subtitles "The story of Jesus and his mother in the Qur'ān"; "Position of Jesus before God"; "What Jesus said and what was said about him"; "Argument of the Qur'ān against the belief in Trinity"; "Jesus is an intercessor not a redeemer"; and "Which Book the people of Book belongs to?"[80]

What is relevant for the present purpose is Ṭabatabā'ī's claim that "The present Torah and Gospels all together clearly declare the oneness of God."[81] He quotes several passages from the New Testament, including Matthew 5:16, 44-48; 6:1, 9, 14, 36, and John 20:17, in which

[79] Ibid., p. 305.
[80] See Ṭabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 274-331.
[81] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 284.

God was referred to as the father of Jesus as well as of others, all in the sense of distinction and honor. However, there are other passages which apparently cannot be explained in terms of distinction and honor, for example, John 1:1-4, 8:11, 42; and 10:30. These and other similar passages of the Gospels, according to Ṭabatabā'ī, have led the Christians to the belief of Trinity in unity (*tathlīth al-waḥda*). In his own words, "The belief of Trinity is an attempt to reconcile the belief that the Christ is the son of God with the belief in one God which the Christ himself had taught."[82] Ṭabatabā'ī goes on to say that although the Gospels do not contain such straightforward statement as "worship God, my Lord and your Lord!" (Q.5:72), they are full of sayings calling people to God and to His worship. Jesus repeatedly declares that God is his Lord in whose hand is the management of his affairs; he openly says that God is the Lord of the people, and never invites them to his own worship – in spite of his reported saying: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Ṭabatabā'ī concludes that "If we accept that it is a correct reporting and then all things are taken together, it must mean: My obedience is God's obedience; thus, it shall have the same connotation as the verse of the Qur'ān: "Whoever obey the Messenger, he indeed obeys God" (Q.4:80)."[83]

As for the Qur'ānic assertion that the Christians had called God the Messiah in Q.5:17 and 72, Ṭabatabā'ī maintains that this statement can be traced back to one of the three Christian sects who believed that God had become one with the Messiah and Messiah was Divine and human both at the same time. To further elaborate these three groups, he says:

> The Christians have differed among themselves in explaining as to how the Christ comprises the essence of divinity. Some say that the Person of the Christ (i.e. the knowledge) had branched out from the Person of the Lord (i.e. the life); and this is the meaning of one of them being the Father, and the other being the Son. Some others say

[82] Ibid., p. 286.
[83] Ibid., p. 291.

> that the Lord was transformed and changed into the Christ. A third group says that the Lord became incarnate in the Christ.[84]

Apparently, Ṭabatabā'ī refers to the three Christian sects that earlier *mufassirūn* have talked about, namely, Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians. In fact, in his commentary on Q.3:79 where he discusses several issues related to the Christian belief, he speaks of these groups as follows: "The Melkites believe in real sonship; the Nestorians explain descendence and sonship as radiance of light on a transparent body like crystal; and the Jacobites explain it in terms of change and transformation, that is, that God was transformed into flesh and blood."[85] But evidently, he continues, the Qur'ān does not look at the peculiarities of their diverse sects. It is concerned only with one belief which is common between all of them – that Jesus is the son of God and of one substance with God, with the resulting belief of Trinity. Therefore, Ṭabatabā'ī argues that each of these three groups fits the phrase "They disbelieve who say 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary.'" Q.5:17 is especially understood by Ṭabatabā'ī as a proof to refute their belief in the divinity of Jesus because that belief contains a contradiction in terms. Like other Muslim reformers, he employs a rational argument to show that to say the Messiah is God rebuts the claim that he is man, an argument that has been refuted by the Council of Chalcedon as we mentioned earlier. In his exegesis of both Q.5:17 and 72, the Iranian exegete emphasizes the significance of the Qur'ānic description of the Messiah as the son of Mary. The Messiah is qualified by the phrase "son of Mary" to show that he was a total man; and "it was because they believed in the divinity of a man, son of a woman, both of whom were created from dust, that they became disbelievers."[86]

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[84] Ibid., vol. 7, p. 69.
[85] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 283.
[86] Ibid., vol. 7, p. 69.

He interprets the Messiah's statement in Q.5:72 in a way similar to that of Hamka. For him, the Qur'ān quotes Jesus as saying "Oh Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord!" to prove Christians' disbelief and rebut their view through the Messiah's own words. As a created servant like them, the Messiah needs a Lord who would look after all his affairs and manage them.[87] However, he differs from Hamka on the interpretation of "Verily whoever associates with God anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers." Here Ṭabatabā'ī understands this phrase as the Qur'ānic rejection of the Christian doctrine of redemption. The Christians believe that the Christ has atoned their sins by offering his own self to be crucified to assure them that all their sins are forgiven in advance.[88] He distinguishes between intercession and redemption, saying that Jesus is one of intercessors, not redeemers. The question of intercession which the Qur'ān talks about in Q.43:86, Ṭabatabā'ī argues, is something quite different from the redemption which the Christians believe in. He spends a great deal of time attempting to prove that the idea of redemption is opposed to the basic Qur'ānic teachings.[89] It must be pointed out, however, that this view is not agreed upon by Muslim scholars. As Mahmoud Ayoub has demonstrated, there are a number of Islamic phenomena which may be related in some way to the idea of redemption. The ethos of redemptive suffering developed widely in the Shī'a community, including the Shī'ī *ta'ziyya* ritual, a mourning passion play commemorating al-Ḥusayn's death at Karbala in 680/61. One may also mention the notion of al-Mahdī, e.g. the "Right-Guided one by

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., p. 70.
[89] Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 291-306.

God," who will be coming at the end of time to restore the world to its purity. In fact, as Ayoub puts it, "[It is] in the idea of the Mahdī, that Islam and Christianity again meet."[90]

Another Shī'ī exegete, Jawād Mughniyya, offers a historical explanation to show that Christians have departed from the Christ's faith. He draws the reader's attention to the historical development of the Christian belief, saying that Jesus and his earlier followers believed in the unity of God, including Arius and Paul of Samosata. This belief, he continues, remained there for some time among Christians until the year 325 when the Council of Nicaea announced the doctrine of Trinity by establishing the divinity of Jesus, and denounced those who said that he is a human. This Nicene creed was reified and implemented by the Roman emperor Constantine, and "thus the Christ became God for them after having been a human."[91] This sketchy narrative of the development of the Christian beliefs leads Mughniyya to conclude that the idea of the divinity of Jesus was much later development only three centuries before the revelation of the Qur'ān.

Certainly, the doctrine of the Trinity developed gradually. One may contend that the Muslim debate about the nature of God also developed much later after the death of the Prophet. One way to understand this gradual development is to think of the Trinity as an 'ecclesiastical doctrine': that is to say, it is the product of reflection on beliefs held by the believing community of Christians: the Church. The Church, the community of believers, is itself to be understood as a hermeneutical community, just like the *mutakallimūn* (Muslim theologians). It has interpreted its own experience of encounter with that which it understands to be the divine mystery. As Paul M.

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[90] For a detail discussion on this, see Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (New York: Mouton, 1978); Ayoub, "The Idea of Redemption in Christianity and Islam," in Spencer J. Palmer (ed.), *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations* (Provo, Ut: Brigham Young University, 1983): pp. 105-116; see also Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Is There a Concept of Redemption in Islam?" in R.I.Z. Werblowsky and C.J. Blecker (eds.), *Types of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 1970): pp. 168-180.

[91] Jawād Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 6, p. 37.

Collins puts it, "It is from this encounter with mystery, as evidenced in the Scriptures, and as lived in contemporary experience, that the will to understand the Godhead as triune emerges. It is from this will to reflect upon and understand the encounter with the divine mystery that what is now received as the doctrine of the Trinity has been produced."[92] Thus, for Christians, the gradual development of the divinity of Jesus would not be problematic because such a doctrine emerged as a result of their reflection on the history of salvation. The Christian theologian Timothy George explains as follows:

> How could the Old Testament affirmation "God is one" be reconciled with the New Testament confession "Jesus is Lord," together with the early Christian experience? Each of these affirmations was subject to great controversy and debate. Marcion questioned the unity of God by lopping off the entire Old Testament revelation. Arius undermined the deity of Jesus by claiming that he was creature made by God at a certain point in time. Others conceive of the Holy Spirit as a force or energy, refusing to recognize his full personhood. Eventually these conflicts found resolution in the Nicene creed, which declared the Son to be of the same essence as the Father. This formula was a great advance over both the radical subordinationism of Arius, which denied the deity of Jesus Christ, and various forms of modalism, which disallowed any self-differentiation within the Godhead.[93]

Like other Muslim reformers, Mughniyya also employs a rational argument to problematize the Christian belief of the divinity of Jesus, and devises a dialectical stratagem by asking the following question: The Christians believe in the Trinity and Unity at the same time, because they say "in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit." How is it possible to reconcile between the Unity and the Trinity? How can the one be three and the three be one? Mughniyya responds to this question by mentioning that the Christians themselves admit that this doctrine is above the realms of finite human reasoning (*fawq al-ʻaql*), and they teach their children this way by saying "If you do not understand this truth (*ḥaqīqa*) now, you will

[92] Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), p. 8.
[93] Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muḥammad* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), pp.87-88.

understand it in the Day of Judgment." Mughniyya seems to be more interested in this answer rather than in attempting to answer the above questions himself. His emphasis on the position of reason in Islam leads him not only to ridicule the Christians' response, but also the Ash'arite position of God which holds that God foreordained unbelief to His servant but in spite of that He punishes him for it. Of course, Mughniyya's characterization of both the Christians' and the Ash'arite positions is highly questionable, but his purpose is to argue that "If the Christians' statement 'three is one' is unreasonable (*ghayr maʿqūl*), so too the Ashʿarite statement 'God does something and then punishes His servant for it.'"[94]

For his part, he emphasizes that "Muslims believe that what is acknowledged as true by reason is also true by religion and what is refused by reason is also refused by religion."[95] Mughniyya then quotes a tradition in which the Prophet says: "The foundation of my religion is reason (*aṣl dīnī al-aql*)."[96] Although this tradition has often been cited by Shīʿī scholars, the question whether reason is the supreme arbiter in deciding what is true and what is untrue is highly contestable in Islam. Thus, Mughniyya's rationalistic approach to faith is out of conformity with the vast majority of Muslims who maintain that revelation in Islam, as in Christianity, takes precedence over rationality. But more importantly, his reliance on rational arguments reflects how difficult it is for Muslims to reassess their understanding of the divinity of Jesus without undermining the unity of God. This will become clearer when we turn to their exegeses of the Qur'ānic verses that deal with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

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[94] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 6, p. 38.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

Trinitarian Doctrine

There are several places in the Qur'ān where the Trinity seems to be explicitly denied. The most often quoted verses are as follows: "O the People of the Book, do not commit excesses in your religion, and say nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and do not say, 'Three.' Refrain; it is better for you. God is only One God" (Q.4:171); "They disbelieve who say, 'God is the Third of Three.' No god is there but One God. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement" (Q.5:73); and finally, "And when God said, 'O Jesus son of Mary, did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God?' He said, 'Glory be to you! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, you would have known it, you know what is in my heart, and I do not know what is in yours; You know all that is unseen'" (Q.5:116).

Muslim polemicists often cite these verses against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but some scholars have questioned whether this is really a valid interpretation. The question is this: Do these verses oppose a truly Christian concept of God, or do they reflect a rather heretical teaching of the Trinity? W. Montgomery Watt, for instance, says "the [Qur'ānic] rejection of the doctrine that 'God is one of three' (5:73) is usually taken to be a denial the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, yet strikingly speaking what is rejected is a doctrine of tritheism which orthodox Christianity also rejects."[97] In line with this, Geoffrey Parrinder writes, "[It] is more likely that that it is heretical doctrines that are denied in the Qur'ān, and orthodox Christians should agree

[97] W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), p. 158.

with most of its statements."[98] Other scholars go even further saying that this may well be due to a misunderstanding of what was meant by the doctrine of the Trinity by confusing it with Tritheism. As Chawkat Moucarry puts it, "What the Qur'ān rightly repudiates is a *misconception* of the Trinity."[99] However, the use of the word "misconception" may be too strong. It is possible that the Christians themselves had a different conception of the Trinity than that understood today and so it was not misunderstood at all. Christianity, it must be remembered, has also been flexible and undergone many changes both in time and in its greater insistence on dogmatic universality. At the time Muḥammad was alive, there were far more different types of Christians – and Jews – which is understandable considering the isolation and lack of centrality these communities experienced. Alternatively, from the Qur'ānic perspective, God's oneness simply cannot be reconciled with the Trinity, which is nothing else than tritheism.

The charge that the Qur'ān misrepresents the doctrine of the Trinity with tritheism is further reinforced by Q.5:116 which implies that Christians were accused of believing in three gods: God, Jesus and Mary, rather than Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Scholars have for a while been searching for possible sources of this unorthodox conception. The standard explanation is that, as discussed briefly in Chapter 1, the Qur'ān might refer to the early Cult of Mary, called the Collyridians, which existed in Arabia in the first four centuries of the Christian era. Unfortunately, the information about this Christian sect is only recorded by St. Epiphanius of

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[98] Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān,* p. 133. Among Western scholars, it seems that this view has been a standard explanation of the Qur'ānic criticism of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Referring to the three verses mentioned above, Timothy George also asserts that "what is rejected in the Qur'ān itself is not the proper Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but rather a heretical belief in three gods." See Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muḥammad?*, p. 59.
[99] Chawkat Moucarry*, Faith to Faith,* p. 188.

Salamis who denounced the cult as "foolish, crazy idolatry and the work of the devil."[100] Other scholars like Michael P. Carroll downplay the importance of this sect, saying that "If anything, the lack of references to the Collyridians in the early literature on heresy suggests that they were an obscure sect of no great importance."[101] Another possible explanation for the Qur'ānic reference to Mary as one of the three gods, which is often overlooked in the recent scholarship, is the goddess connotation of Mary that is found in relatively early Christian apocrypha. The Gnostic literature such as the *Gospel of Philip,* for instance, seems to identify Jesus' mother with the Holy Spirit, while the *Gospel of the Hebrew* describes Mary as an Incarnation of the archangel Michael, and the *Odes of Solomon* in which Mary is described as Wisdom.[102]

The following discussion of Modern Muslim approaches to the three verses mentioned above is intended to enrich the above explanations. Interestingly, Qāsimī opens the possibility that Q.5:73 refers to the Collyridians. I have not been able to trace Qāsimī's sources, but he clearly says: "Among the Christians there was a group (*firqa*) called 'Collyridians' who said that gods are three: the Father, the Son, and Mary."[103] Therefore, Qāsimī glosses the Qur'ānic phrase "God is the Third of Three" as follows: "One of the three gods; it means, one of them, namely God, Mary, and Jesus."[104] Similarly, in his interpretation of Q.4:171, the Qur'ānic phrase "Do not say: Three" is glossed "Three gods: God, the Messiah, and Mary." It is based on the verse

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[100] Stephen Benko translates St. Epiphanius' description of a Collyridian ceremony as follows: "For some women decorate a carriage or a square chair by covering it with fine linen, and on a certain definite day of the year [on certain days] they set forth bread and offer it as sacrifice in the name of Mary." See Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots if Mariology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), p. 171.

[101] Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 44-45.

[102] See Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: an Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); pp. 38-42 and 123-134; John Davidson, *The Odes of Solomon: Mystical Songs from the Time of Jesus* (Bath: Clear Press, 2005); see also Chris Maunder, "Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in the New Testament," in Chris Maunder (ed.) *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Burns and Oates, 2008),p. 28.

[103] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl,* vol. 6, p. 2098. In his comment on Q.4:171, he refers to Abd Allah al-Hindi as his source. Perhaps, he means Rahmatullah al-Kayrānawī al-Hindī who wrote *Iẓhar al-Ḥaqq.*

[104] Ibid.

"Did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God?" (Q.5:116). He then says: "It is possible that this matter was written in their manuscripts (*nusakh*) and therefore the Qur'ān denied it."[105] Qāsimī also cites *Kitāb 'ilm al-yaqīn* which had referred to a Christian sect called "Maryāmiyyūn."[106] To further reinforce his view, he argues that even the historian Ibn Isḥāq in his *Sīra* also affirms that among the Christians of Najrān who visited the Prophet there were some who said "Jesus is God," others who said "He is the son of God," and still others who said "He is the third of three," namely God, Jesus and Mary. And Q.5:73 was revealed in response to all of their statements.[107]

Ṭabatabā'ī does not agree with the view of ascribing Mary to the person of the Trinity (*thalātha*) mentioned in the Qur'ān. Instead, he distinguishes between taking Mary as a god and believing in her divinity. Taking someone as a god is applicable to submitting to her/him with humility. The Qur'ān claims that Christians take Mary (*ittakhadū*) as a goddess, and not that they believe in her as a goddess. Of the six Muslim reformers whose *tafsīr*s examined in this study, Ṭabatabā'ī provides the most elaborated discussion on this issue. He argues that some people have found it hard to explain Q.5:116 because the Christians do not believe in the divinity of the Virgin Mary. However, he claims to find several sources indicating that the Christians had indeed worshipped her and such a worship is still observed today. From the nineteenth-century Muslim *mufassir* Abū al-Thanā' al-Alūsī, he learns that Abū Ja'far al-Imāmī has narrated from some Christians that in the past there was a sect called "Maryāmiyya" who worshipped and venerated her. Rashīd Riḍā is also cited to have said: "As for the Christ's mother, her worship

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[105] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 1765.
[106] Ibid., vol. 6, 2098. I have not been able to ascertain the author of this book, because there are many books with the same title.
[107] Ibid., p. 1922.

was agreed upon in the Eastern and Western Churches after Constantine, then it was rejected by the Protestant denomination."[108]

Ṭabatabā'ī then discusses various modes of worship offered by Christians to Mary, mother of Christ:

> There is a *ṣalāt* which contains prayer, praise, call for help and intercession; there is also a fact ascribed to her and named after her; and all this is joined with humility to her remembrance, and to her pictures and images, combined with the belief in her authority emanating from the unseen world. That authority, according to their belief, enables her to bring benefit and harm in this world and the next, either by herself or through her son. They have clearly declared that it is incumbent to worship her. However, we do not know of any of their sects which would use the word "goddess" for her. Yet, we know that they name her "Mother of God", and some sects make it clear that it is used in its literal, not metaphorical, sense.[109]

When the Qur'ān says that they had taken the Christ and his mother as gods besides Allah, for Ṭabatabā'ī, it is because the taking is other than naming: taking them for gods occurs when they worship them, and this is what happening in their case. We are told that he first came to know that the Christians indeed worshiped Mary was when he read a book titled *al-Sawā'ī,* from among the books of the Greek Orthodox, which he saw in a monastery called Dayr al-Tilmīdh. In this book, Ṭabatabā'ī tells us, "the Catholics declare openly about that and take pride in it."[110] He also refers to the Jesuit magazine, *al-Mashriq* (No.9), published in Beirut in 1904, which is decorated with Mary's pictures and colored designs. In its seventh-year edition, which was designed as a souvenir to celebrate the Golden Jubilee at the end of the fifth year since the announcement of the Pope Pius IX that the Virgin Mary had become pregnant without pollution of sin, the editor-in-chief of this magazine, Louis Cheikho, wrote an article entitled "*'Aqīda al-ḥabl bilā danas fī al-kanā'is al-sharqiyya*" in which he explicitly says that "the worship by

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[108] Ṭabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 7, p. 243.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 244.

Armenian Church of the chaste Virgin, the Mother of God, is certainly a well-known affair" (*la-amr mashhūr*).[111] He also writes: "The Coptic Church is distinguished by its worship of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God."[112]

With these testimonies, Ṭabatabā'ī wants to argue that the Qur'ān confirms the fact that some Christians worshipped Mary. The Indonesian exegete Hamka also makes mention of the Armenian and Coptic Churches as examples of those Christians who worshipped Mary. He says that "in addition to the belief of the Trinity, the Eastern and Western Churches, especially Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic, have elevated Mary to the divine status, to whom they pray, ask for blessing and healing, and offer various kinds of worship."[113] Hamka mentions a more recent example of what is generally known as "Marian apparitions" in several places.[114] One of the approved apparitions by the Church is the apparition of Mary at Fatima, a small village in Portugal. It was reported that the Virgin Mary appeared to three children on seven different occasions from May 13 to October 13, 1917. Since then Fatima became a place of sanctuary and worship.[115] It must be pointed, however, that merely making pilgrimage visits to the apparition sites does not amount to worship, as Hamka has claimed. This reformer also alludes to an interesting phenomenon in Indonesia where most Catholics have Mary's statue in

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[111] Ibid. Cf. Louis Cheikho, "'Aqīda al-ḥabl bila danas fī al-kanā'is al-sharqiyya," *al-Mashriq* 9 (1904): p. 399.
[112] Ibid., p. 403.
[113] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* vol. 7, p. 90.
[114] The word "apparition" comes from the late Latin word "apparition" which means "appearance" or "presence." An apparition refers to the sudden appearance of a supernatural entity which directly manifests itself to a human individual or group. Within a Catholic context, it could be the appearance of any supernatural figure. In *A Catholic Dictionary,* apparition is defined as "the name sometimes reserved for certain kinds of supernatural vision, namely, those that are bodily or visibly, as is often used for the manifestation of Our Lady of Lourdes, of St. Michael on Monte Gargano, etc." See Donald Attwater (ed.) *A Catholic Dictionary* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), s.v. "Apparition," p. 30. As for the Catholic Church's position on this, one Catholic scholar says: "The Church accepts the authenticity of a supernatural apparition only with great circumspection. She requires that the facts, which she submits to a severe examination, should in themselves be striking and also insists on waiting before passing judgment." See Louis Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady* (New York: Herder and Herder Publishing, 1960), p. 30.
[115] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar,* p. 90.

their houses and regard it with a high esteem. He then concludes: “As a result, in addition to the belief of One God in three Persons (Trinity), they [Catholics] also take Mary as a goddess. However, this additional belief has been rejected by the Protestants.”[116]

Let us now return to the question of the Trinity. What leads some scholars to think that the Qur’ānic conception of the Trinity includes God, Jesus and Mary is because the Qur’ān does not explicitly say what the Trinity consists of. While Q.5:73 asks the Christians to believe in God and Messengers and not to say “Three,” Q.4:171 denounces those who say that God is the third of the three. In addition, in Q.5:116 the Qur’ānic Jesus denies that he had told his people to take him and his mother as gods, besides God. This, along with the report that certain Christian sects venerated Mary, leads scholars, including Qāsimī, to think of the Qur’ānic criticism as directed against the belief in three gods. Even if the Trinity were understood in a way most Christians today would accept, it is still problematic to Muslim reformers. Rashīd Riḍā does not accept the notion of Trinitarian monotheism. Scholars used to say that both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions. The difference is that the Islamic monotheism is unitarian in the sense that Islam rejects the existence of personal relationships within the Godhead, whereas the Christian monotheism, which teaches that God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is trinitarian.[117] For Riḍā, to speak of the Trinity as “the synthesis between the pure Trinity (*tathlīth haqīqī*) and the pure Unity (*tawḥīd haqīqī*) is contradiction (*tanāqud*) rejected by reasons and common senses.”[118]

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[116] Ibid.
[117] As Chawkat Moucarry puts it, “Trinitarian monotheism means that God is a relational God. Before creating the universe, God was already enjoying a relational life. Within the Godhead the Father related to the Son, the Son to the Father, the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit, and so on.” Chawkat Moucarry, *Faith to Faith,* p. 212.
[118] Ibid.

Riḍā argues that the Trinity contradicts the very principle of unity of God, that is, *tanzīh* which literally means "to declare something pure and free of something else." The perspective of *tanzīh* affirms God's oneness by declaring that God is one and He cannot be compared to and associated with any created thing. It seems that Riḍā understands the three persons of the Trinity in terms of three parts, fractions, or emanations of God. Thus, the Qur'ānic phrase "God is only One God" is understood to mean "He neither has parts (*ajzā'*) nor persons (*aqānīm*) nor is he constitutive (*murakkab*) nor united with any of the creatures."[119] To reinforce his view that the Christians understood the Christ as a part (*juz'*) of God, he narrates an anecdote took place during the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r.170-193/768-809). One of his Christian physicians had a conversation with 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Wāqidī (d.207/823) about the nature of Jesus, saying: "Indeed, in your scripture there is a verse that points to the nature of Jesus as a part of God." He then recited the very Qur'ānic verse under discussion (Q.5:73) calling the Christ a "spirit of/from God" (*rūḥ minhu*). Here the Arabic word "min" is understood to function as *tab'īḍ* (division, partly). In response, Wāqidī recites Q.45:12 "God has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him (*jamī'an minhu*)," and then says that, based on this verse, everything is a part of God. The Christian physician gave up and embraced Islam. Al-Rashīd was so happy with his embracing Islam that he awarded Wāqidī several gifts.[120]

From the Christian perspective, when they speak of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they are not thinking of three separate and distinct gods. The Christians claim that Christianity is a monotheistic religion, as much as Islam. Can the claim that God is one but has

[119] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, p. 87.
[120] Ibid.

thalātha aqānīm (three persons) be categorized as the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) or the multiplicity of gods (*ta'addud al-āliha*)? Riḍā would claim the latter. However, the Lebanese Shī'ī exegete Jawād Mughniyya responds to this question differently. For him, the answer to this question depends on what we mean by the word *aqānīm*, which is transliterated from Syriac as the normal translation of the Greek *hypostases,* "persons." "If they (*thalātha āqanīm*) are meant attributes such as merciful (*raḥmān*) and compassionate (*raḥīm*)," Mughniyya argues, "then the above statement (God is one but has *thalātha aqānīm*) can be categorized as a *tawḥīd*. But if they are meant individual persons, then it is a multiplicity of God."[121] The problem is that, he continues, scholars tend to understand *aqānīm* in terms of individual persons (*shakhṣ*). Moreover, the words "al-ab" (the father) and "al-ibn" (the son) necessitates plurality and difference in the person and the self. This is attested by the fact that there are pictures and statues of the virgin Mary in the Church that certainly point to this multiplicity, because she is portrayed as carrying a child symbolizing the Messiah.[122]

There are, at least, two points to note here. First, the Trinity is accepted if it is understood in the Islamic framework, that is, in terms of God's attributes. That is exactly what some Arab Christians have been trying to do since their early encounters with the Muslims in such a way that they began to look for appropriate expression of the doctrine that may be understandable to people who do not accept them. David Thomas, a British scholar who has devoted his scholarship to translating the works of both earlier Arab Christians and Muslims, asserts that around the eighth and ninth centuries "we find Arabic speaking Christian theologians expressing

[121] Muḥammad Jawad Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 5, p. 345.
[122] Ibid.

the doctrine of the Trinity in precisely the same terms as these Muslim theologians."[123] One of such works is *Kitāb al-Burhān* written by the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Basrī (d. early 3rd /9th century) in which he gives the fullest explanation of the Trinity. He explains that when Christians speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they mean only the equivalent of the statement that God is living and speaking (*hayy, nātiq*) and that the Father has Life and Word (*lahū ḥayāt wa-kalima*).[124] Recently, Jon Hoover of the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, explains the Trinity in terms of four levels of *tawḥīd* expounded by the modern Shī'ī scholar Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1979), namely *al-tawḥīd al-dhātī* (the unity of God's essence), *al-tawḥīd al-ṣifātī* (the unity of God's attributes), *al-tawḥīd al-af'ālī* (the unity of God's acts) and *al-tawḥīd al-'ibādī* (the exclusive worship of God).[125] The well-respected scholar Harry Austryn Wolfson goes a step further arguing "It is thus in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that we must look for the origin of the Muslim doctrine of divine attributes."[126] However, Wolfson does not explain satisfactorily how the Muslims' discussion of divine attributes was influenced by the very doctrine that they vehemently rejected.

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[123] David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era" in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.) *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 88.

[124] Ibid., p. 89. For a more discussion of 'Ammār's account of the Trinity, see Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm in 'Ammār al-Bashrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity," in K Samir (ed.) *Actes du premier congrès international d'études chrétiennes, Goslar, September 1980,* [*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 218], (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982): pp. 169-191.

[125] Hoover distinguishes between two types of the Trinity: immanent and economic. The former is meant God in Himself, while the latter is God in relationship to creatures in His "economy" or plan of salvation. God in Himself (in the immanent Trinity) is free and self-sufficient from the world, but God for us (in the economic Trinity) has nonetheless chosen out of grace to create the world and reconcile it to Himself. Hoover explains that there is parallel between the economic Trinity and *al-tawḥīd al-af'ālī* in that "the Trinity in its economic aspect affirms that the acts of God toward us, whether those of the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, are all acts of the one and only God…. Muslims asserts with *al-tawḥīd al-af'ali* that God is the sole Creator of the universe and the One to whom all things are returning." See Jon Hoover, "Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 27/1 (2009): pp. 57-82.

[126] Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity," *Harvard Theological review* 49/1 (1956): p. 2.

Second, it seems that Muslims had some difficulty in understanding *uqnūm* other than as an individual person that is distinguishable from another. Understood as such, the three *aqānīm* violate the unity of God. In fact, from the early history of Christianity there had been a long and rich discussion on ways to express the three members of the Trinity. Among the several terms by which the Trinity has been described are hypostases, persons, and substances.[127] Sabellius of the third century understood each of the members of the Trinity as "a character (*prosopon*) or form of manifestation of the one God,"[128] and thus he conceived of Jesus as having no personality. Sabellius' theory was rejected, but, according to Parrinder, his teaching is the easiest to grasp, especially in the missions where other languages lack the very word "person."[129] Scholars like Karl Rahner recognize some difficulty connected with the concept of "person" and ask whether the concept of person is suited to express faithfully that which is meant in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. He suggests that "in reference to God, we may not speak of three persons in the same way that we do elsewhere."[130] Thus, the difficulty is one of linguistic usage which exists nowhere else. Rahner then concludes: "if we wish to understand the use of 'three persons' correctly (this supposes that we forget the usual meaning of the words), we must always return to the original experience of salvation history."[131] This is certainly the issue that is absent in the Muslim discussion of the three persons of the Trinity.

Even Abul Kalam Azad, who is the most inclusivist of the Muslim reformers, seems to understand the Trinity as a form of *ghuluw* (excessiveness) in religion. In his exegesis of Q.5:73, he understands that the first part of the verse "O People of the Book, do not commit excesses in

[127] Ibid., p. 4.
[128] Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān,* p. 138.
[129] Parrinder mentions that in Africa the Trinity is expressed as "one God in three men," for the very word "person" was lacking. See, ibid.
[130] Karl Rahner, *Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 105.
[131] Ibid., pp. 105-106.

your religion, and say nothing but the truth about God" is addressed to both Christians and Jews. "One of the weaknesses of the People of the Book," he says, "was their excessive zeal in religious matters. When they thought of showing affection and respect for anyone, they went to the length of elevating him to the status of God Himself; and when they turned against, they stooped so low as to condemn the very truth he upheld."[132] The verse then speaks of the Christians in particular, and points out that in their love and respect for the Christ, they not only made of him the Son of God, but developed a definite doctrine of the Trinity – the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.[133] On Q.5:173, Azad simply says, "The Christians turned away from the right religion and coined for themselves the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus in the Trinity.[134] According to Azad, the idea underlying the Qur'ānic criticism of the Christian doctrines is "to emphasize that the Messengers of God preached but one concept, namely the unity of God. It was only their followers that came after them who deified their prophets."[135]

The emphasis on the Trinity as a form of religious excessiveness is prevalent among the Muslim reformers. Hamka, for instance, looks at Q.4:73 as a reminder to Christians of their excessive attitude towards Jesus. But such a reminder is also applicable to Muslims as the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said: "Do not elevate me like Christians elevated the son of Mary. Instead, I am but His servant and Messenger."[136] In his interpretation of the Qur'ānic phrase "Do not say, 'Three.' Refrain; it is better for you," Hamka alludes to the divergence of opinions among Christians regarding the nature of God. Interestingly, he does not translate the

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[132] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol. 2, p. 273.
[133] Ibid., pp. 273-274.
[134] Ibid., pp. 309-310.
[135] Ibid., p. 328.
[136] Hamka, *Tafsīr Al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 75.

Arabic word “uqnūm” because there is no equivalent word for “person” in Indonesian language. In his eyes, the Qur’ān urges the Christians to refrain from saying “Three,” because there is no end in their debate about the Trinity: God has three persons.[137] The reason for this diverse opinion is two-fold. Firstly, Christians themselves believe that the Trinity is a “mystery” and above the human reasoning. Secondly, they also admit that this doctrine is not taught by Jesus himself. It was developed after his death especially by Paul, who had never met with the Christ.[138]

In his exegesis of Q.5:73, Hamka goes even further by asserting that the Trinity is of pagan origins. Here we can see the enormous influence of Riḍā’s *al-Manār* on his *tafsīr*. The latter spends a great deal of time highlighting Christianity’s deep indebtedness to its pagan origins. Under the section “On the Doctrine of the Trinity” (*faṣl fī ‘aqīda al-tathlīth*), Riḍā makes an extensive reference to Western sources. He says, “As for the paganistic nature of this doctrine, European scholars have explained in detail and provided many examples to show the ancient traces in this doctrine.”[139] On the trinity according to Brahmans, he cites Thomas Maurice’s *Indian Antiquities* and Thomas William Doane’s *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions.* The latter is cited to have said: “If we turn to India we shall find that one of the most prominent features in the Indian theology is the doctrine of a divine triad, governing all things. This triad is called *Tri-murti* – from the Sanskrit word *tri* (three) and *murti* (form) – and consists

[137] Ibid., p. 79.
[138] Ibid., p. 78-79.
[139] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 88.

of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is an *inseparable* unity, though three in form."[140] Doane goes on to explain that Brahma is the Father, Vishnu the Son, and Shiva the Holy Spirit.

Doane's work is cited extensively by Riḍā not only with regard to the belief of Brahmans, but also the similar beliefs of Buddhists and ancient Egyptians. Doane writes that Thulis, a great monarch, who at one time reigned over all Egypt, is said to have addressed the oracle in these words: "Tell me if ever there was before one greater than I, or will ever be one greater than me?" The oracle responded: "First *God*, afterward the *Word*, and with them the *Holy Spirit*, all of these are of the same nature, and make but *one* whole, but which the power is eternal. Go away quickly, *mortal*, thou who hast but an uncertain life." Doane then concludes: "The idea of calling the second person in the Trinity the *Logos*, or *Word*, is an Egyptian feature, and was engrafted into Christianity many centuries after the time of Christ Jesus."[141] In addition to Doane, Riḍā also refers to James Bonwick's *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought* (1878) and Godfrey Higgins' *Anacalypsis* (1836). In fact, in my brief research on the topic of the pagan origins of the Trinity, I found several books written by Western authors during the nineteenth century. But I have not been able to find lengthy rebuttals of these arguments for the pagan origin of the doctrine of the Trinity, nor will I attempt to provide one myself since this is beyond the scope of the present study.[142]

Unlike Riḍā, Qāsimī does not go as far as to attribute pagan origins to the doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps, he is well aware that the Christian doctrine developed over a period of time and

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[140] Ibid. Cf. Thomas William Doane, *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1882), p. 369.

[141] Doane, *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions*, p. 373.

[142] It is a worthwhile that the influence of Riḍā's discussion of the Western literature on the origin of the Trinity can also be found in Ṭabatabā'ī's *tafsīr*. Almost all of Riḍā's references and quotations from the Western sources are also cited by the Shī'ī exegete. In the footnote on page 322, Ṭabatabā'ī says, "the reader will find these quotations in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the book *al-'Aqā'id al-wathaniyya fi al-diyāna al-Naṣrāniyya,* and other sources." See Ṭabatabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 80-322.

had been enriched by long debates and controversies. Even if it is true that the doctrine was indebted to other traditions, it must have been Christianized in a similar way certain pre-Islamic beliefs and customs were incorporated into Islam after having undergone some sort of Islamization. What concerns Qāsimī is to explore how the controversies and debates had led Christians to a more moderate view of the Trinity. He refers to Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Risāla al-Qubrūsiyya* that describes various views of Christians regarding the nature of the Trinity and union. I should point out here that Qāsimī's reference to *al-Risāla al-Qubrūsiyya,* instead of Ibn Taymiyya's magnum opus *al-Jawāb al-saḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, is significant. As Thomas F. Michel has rightly noticed that "The tone of *al-Risāla* is conciliatory."[143] This letter was written by the Shaykh al-Islām to Sirjwas the King of Cyprus requesting good treatment for the Muslim prisoners who were interned there. In this work, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the very foundation of all religions is the belief in God and His Messengers and the matter of religion is the unity of God and the acknowledgment of His Messengers. He contends that the believers of the Trinity in the unity and the union in the message have added another element to the very foundation of their religion.[144] Qāsimī acknowledges that the Christian concept of God developed over a long period of time. Some went to an extreme view claiming that gods are three, and others ascribed to the moderate view saying "God is one substance with three persons, namely the person of the Father, the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit. All is one in substance. The person of the Father is the

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[143] Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* (New York: Caravan Books, 1984), p. 74.
[144] See Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 5, p. 1767.

Essence (*al-dhāt*), the person of the Son is the Word (*al-kalima*), and the person of the Holy Spirit is the Life (*al-ḥayāt*)."[145]

This does not mean, however, that Qāsimī accepts the above description as a valid characterization of the unity of God. Nevertheless, he certainly believes there are some Christians who remained unitarians until today. He relies on the information given by the priest Jabbāra in his book *al-Ra'y al-ṣawāb wa faṣl al-khitāb.* In this book, Jabbāra describes that in the last 80 years there have emerged in the United States Unitarian Christians (*al-Masīhiyyūn al-muwaḥḥidūn*) who have been able to build about three hundred churches and they are mostly in the educational institutions. A similar phenomenon takes place in Britain. They regard the Qur'ān as they regard the Gospel and the Torah as divine scriptures. Jabbāra also says that "All revealed scriptures teach the unity and negate the trinity of gods (*tathlīth al-āliha*) in the sense that God is three."[146] Qāsimī himself argues that the Unity is still better than the Trinity. Unlike other Muslim reformers who interpret the Qur'ānic phrase "Refrain; it is better for you" (Q.4:171) as "Refrain from saying the Trinity, it is better for you," Qāsimī understand it to mean "Strive for something better than the Trinity, namely the Unity."[147]

Concluding Remarks

Up to this point, it is safe to say that the Muslim reformers have some difficulty in accepting three major theological claims, namely, the sonship of Jesus, his divine nature and the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, these three issues are inter-related to each other. For Muslims, accepting any one of them could put the unity of God at risk. There are, at least, three main difficulties

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[145] Ibid.
[146] Cited by Qāsimī, ibid., p. 1766.
[147] Ibid., p. 1767: "*Uqsudū khayran min al-tathlīth wa-huwa al-tawḥīd*."

facing the Muslims. Firstly, the Christian doctrine is often seen as contradictory to the principle of *tawḥīd* taught by all the Prophets. The Qur'ān advocates that the main message of all Prophets is the same: the unity of God. The Muslim reformers had some difficulty in understanding that the Trinity, for instance, could be considered as a form of its expression. Secondly, the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity developed much later and was "clarified and defined by Christians only after centuries of controversies and debates within the Church."[148] It is hard for Muslims to accept the Christian doctrine that is not taught by Jesus. As discussed earlier, some Muslim reformers allude to the fact that even the words "Trinity" or "God in three persons" are not found in the Bible. This is admitted by Christian theologians, however, they argue that the idea is taught by the Bible. Thirdly, for Muslims, God's oneness cannot be reconciled with the Trinity, which for them is nothing else than tritheism. Most Muslim reformers whose *tafsīr*s are examined in this study regard the Trinity as irrational.

Perhaps, this illustrates the complex nature of the Christian doctrine, which makes it difficult for Muslims to understand it. Even some Christian theologians admit that the Trinity, ultimately, remains a mystery. In the words of the theologian Timothy George: "Given the ferocity of the debates and the issues at stake, it is not surprising that many Christians did not grasp it all at once. Indeed, some have not yet grasped it!"[149] The famous nineteenth-century Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher chose to relegate the doctrine of the Trinity to a few lines at the end of his massive systematic theology titled *The Christian Faith.* In fact, Schleiermacher has been accused of marginalizing the doctrine, as one author concludes: "The placement of the doctrine of the Trinity at the end expresses the mere marginal significant that

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[148] Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muḥammad?,* p. 58.
[149] Timothy George, "The Trinity and the Challenge of Islam," in Timothy George (ed.) *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 113.

the Trinity has for *The Christian Faith*."[150] Schleiermacher's motive is subject to debate, but his message is clear: The less said about the Trinity the better! However, in the Muslim-Christian dialogue, the question of the Trinity, along with the sonship of Jesus and his divine nature, occupies the most central theme of the theological encounter. As discussed earlier, although Muslim reformers reject the doctrine at face value, their approaches to it vary in tone. Some give a fairer description to it than others. Some approach with a polemical tone while others with a sort of conciliatory.

From the above exploration, it is clear that theological differences are the most difficult things to overcome. To move forward, there is a lot to be done to narrow down the gap between the Christian and Muslim conception of God. Perhaps, we must first think that their conceptual difference is not impossible to reconcile. I would argue that the difference between Christianity and Islam over the doctrine of the Trinity is not a question about the oneness of God. It is a question about the nature of that oneness. Both faith traditions affirm without hesitation the absolute uniqueness and unity of the one God over against all idolatry and polytheism. While Muslims emphasize the unity of God in its strict sense, Christians believe that it can allow differentiation without fragmentation. In other words, both Muslims and Christians speak of the unity of God, but they differ in the way to express it.

[150] For a more discussion on this, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher's Understanding of God as Triune," in Jacqueline Marina (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 171-188.

Chapter Five
INTER-RELIGIOUS RESTRICTIONS AND ENGAGEMENTS

Societies and cultures can be judged according to the way they treat their minorities, Jacques Waardenburg rightly notes, and the same can be said about religions.[1] They too can be judged according to the way they treat religious minorities, both on the level of doctrines and on the level of social interactions. In the previous chapter, theological and doctrinal aspects of the Qur'ānic views of other religions have been discussed, and this chapter will focus on Qur'ānic treatments of other religions in terms of social aspects of inter-religious interactions and engagements. The Qur'ān seems to give contradictory guidance on how Muslims ought to treat the other. On the one hand, the Qur'ān allows for religious freedom which is best captured in the closing line of sūra 109: "To you your religion (or law) and to me mine." On the other hand, however, there are passages in the Qur'ān that suggest an irreconcilable attitude toward other religious communities. From the historical perspective, scholars used to explain this contradiction in terms of different contexts to which the Qur'ān responded.[2] In the Meccan period, where the new-born religion was still weak, the question of faith is left to be decided by God in the next world. This attitude of tolerance seems to shift in Medina, where the Qur'ān becomes more aggressive and exclusive in its polemic against not only the pagans but also Jews and Christians.

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[1] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 404.
[2] John Kaltner, for instance, notes: "The [Qur'ānic] text does not present a single position on how Muslim should relate to non-Muslims but offers a variety of possible responses that are at times in conflict with one another. This is due to the changing contexts of the early community, as Muḥammad and his followers found themselves having to respond to many different situations and incidents." See John Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'ān for Today's Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), pp. 136-137.

This ambiguity within the Qur'ān regarding its attitude toward non-Muslims, especially Jews and Christians, raises a host of important questions for those who look to the Qur'ān as a guide to help them understand what Islam teaches about the other. Which of these conflicting attitudes should be the ethical position of Muslims in their relation with non-Muslims? Are some passages more relevant than others? How do we reconcile the conflicting messages? Is it proper to accept some texts as a valid while rejecting others? The traditional reading of these conflicting attitudes involves two strategies. The first is by looking at the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in order to provide historical contexts for revelations that would help Muslims understand the circumstances in which certain passages were revealed. The problem with relying on *asbāb al-nuzūl* is that the *mufassirūn* themselves "seldom agree and often contradict one another."[3] The second and more elaborated strategy to solve the seemingly contradictory material is by way of *al-nāsikh wal-mansūkh* (the abrogating and abrogated [verses]). *Naskh* or abrogation is a legal strategy by which a verse of the Qur'ān revealed earlier is considered superseded or abrogated by a later revelation thereby becoming inactive.[4] However, like the problem of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the early Muslim scholars who developed this theory also disagreed greatly over which verses abrogated which.[5]

[3] Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: the Origins of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 49. I have discussed in several places of this dissertation different approaches employed by Muslim reformers with regard to the authenticity of this literature known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* or "occasions of revelation." I have shown that some reformers are more skeptical than others. For a discussion on the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see Andrew Rippin, "The Function of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51/1 (1988): 1-20; see also Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-nuzūl*: a Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): 1-15.

[4] For a detailed discussion on *naskh*, see David Powers, "The Exegetical Genre nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa mansūkhuhū," in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988): pp. 117-138; John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

[5] Speaking of *asbāb nuzūl* and *naskh* in the context of the so called "sword verses," Reuven Firestone argues that the two strategies carry "serious weaknesses, the major one being that the early exegetes who collectively developed

This chapter deals with reformist Muslim approaches to those verses which Muslim scholars generally consider them as abrogating other Qur'ānic texts that are conciliatory and speak about the members of other faiths in positive terms. These verses are polemical and critical in tone and are generally regarded as obstacles to the peaceful co-existence among different religious communities, which include the Qur'ānic injunctions on fighting non-Muslims (Q.9:29), prohibiting Muslims to take the unbelievers as friends (5:51), and distrusting Jews and Christians (2:120). Muslim reformers seem to de-emphasize the notion of abrogation, and instead they develop different approaches to the so-called "sword verses." However, I must point out at the outset that these Muslim reformers are not going far enough in contextualizing the polemical verses in connection with modern conceptions of freedom, justice and equality.

Treatment of Non-Muslim *Dhimmī*s

In classical Islamic society, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were based on the concept of the *dhimma*. The term *dhimma* literally means "contract," "bond," "obligation," "protection," or "security," but is legally defined as "a sort of permanent agreement between Muslim political authorities and non-Muslim subjects which provides protection for Muslims and peaceful internal relations with non-Muslim subjects. In return the latter accepted Islamic rule and paid *al-jizya* [poll tax] in lieu of serving in the army."[6] Thus, non-Muslims living in a Muslim society are called *ahl al-dhimma* or *dhimmīyyūn*. However, the word "*ahl al-dhimma*" or *dhimmī*s does not occur in the Qur'ān, but, as Fazlur Rahman rightly notes, "grew out of the

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this [evolutionary] theory [of war] disagreed greatly over the occasions of revelation, their dating, and which verses abrogated which." See Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: the Origins of Holy War in Islam*, p 50.

[6] AbdulHameed AbuSulayman, "*Al-Dhimma* and Related Concepts in Historical Perspective," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 9/1 (1988), p. 9. See also Syed Z. Abedin, "*Al-Dhimma*: the Non-Believers' Identity in Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 3/1 (1992): pp. 40-57.

early political practice of Muslims."[7] The word "jizya" does occur in the Qur'ān (9:29) where it says the People of the Book should pay *jizya* or tribute. It was the Muslim jurists in the early centuries of Islam, according to Rahman, who "conceived of *jizya* as a tax imposed upon the People of the Book in lieu of military service because these communities could not be expected to join Muslims in jihad."[8]

Indeed, most scholars interested in how non-Muslims ought to be treated in a Muslim society refer primarily to Q.9:29, which says: "Fight those who do not believe in God and the Last Day, do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth among those who have been given the Book until they pay the tribute (*jizya*) out of hand (*'an yadin*) and they are humbled (*wa-hum ṣāghirūn*)." This verse has for a while attracted a wide scholarly discussion especially with regard to the terms *'an yadin* and *ṣāghirūn*.[9] The term *jizya* is a *hapax legomenon*, which becomes the only scriptural basis for the *dhimmī* payment of poll tax.[10] Since the focus of scholars' discussion is on how the *jizya* should be paid, other issues such as from whom the *jizya* should be collected and whether or not the *jizya* can be discarded at all remain unexplored. Certainly Q.9:29 addresses more than just the questions of

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[7] Fazlur Rahman, "Non-Muslim Minorities in an Islamic State," *Journal of Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7/1 (1986), p. 20.

[8] Ibid.

[9] In an article in 1953, Franz Rosenthal initiated the debate on *al-jizya 'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn* with a survey of European translations of the phrase and recourse to such classical *tafsīr*s as those of Ṭabarī and Bayḍāwī. See Franz Rosenthal, "Some Minor Problems in the Qur'ān," in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume: Studies in History and Philology* (New York, 1953): pp.67-84. Almost ten years later, Claude Cahen argued that *'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn* is an indication of gesture of submission, in his article "Coran IX.29: Hatta yu'tu l-jizya 'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn," *Arabica* 9 (1962): pp. 76-79. Cahen's article provoked two responses by M.J. Kister and Meïr Bravmann in the same journal. See Kister, "'An Yadin (Qur'ān, IX.29): an Attempt at Interpretation," *Arabica* 11 (1964): pp. 272-278; Bravmann, "The Ancient Background of the Qur'ānic Concept of al-Jizyatu 'an Yadin," *Arabica* 13 (1966): pp. 307-317. Uri Rubin has recently contributed two articles to the discussion: Uri Rubin, "Qur'ān and Tafsīr: the Case of 'an Yadin," *Der Islam* 70 (1993): pp. 134-144; Rubin, "Qur'ān and Poetry: More Data concerning the Qur'ānic *jizya* verse ('an yadin)," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): pp. 139-146.

[10] For a good discussion on this, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on *ayat al-jizyah* and *ayat al-sayf*," in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (eds.) *Conversion and Continuity* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), pp.103-119.

jizya, *'an yadin* and *wa-hum ṣāghirūn*. In addition to the above issues, modern Muslim exegetes address such questions as what causes fighting and how the verse relates to other verses that seem to envision religious freedom for non-Muslims.

The first question that attracts the exegetes' attention is the context of revelation. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī mentions conflicting reports about the circumstance in which Q.9:29 was revealed. He relates that Mujāhid is of the opinion that the verse was revealed when the Prophet was commanded to fight the Byzantines, which was the eastern part of the Roman Empire during the periods of the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. It is reported that soon after the revelation of this verse he fought the battle of Tabūk. Qāsimī also alludes to the view of al-Kalbī that the verse was revealed in the context of the Jews of Banū Qurayẓa and Banū Naḍīr.[11] Here we can see that while Mujāhid refers to the verse as related to the fight against the Byzantine Christians, for Kalbī it was concerned with the Jews of Banū Qurayẓa and Banū Naḍīr. Qāsimī also cites Ibn Kathīr who agrees with Mujāhid, and adds that the verse was revealed in year ten after the *hijra* (migration). According to Ibn Kathīr, in preparation for the battle against the Byzantines, Muḥammad gathered about thirty thousand fighters.[12] The Egyptian reformer Rashīd Riḍā also cites Mujāhid's view, however, he disagrees with it, arguing that "the politics of Islam (*siyāsat al-islām*) was concerned specifically with the Arabs of the Peninsula (*'arab al-jazīra*

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[11] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl* (Cairo: Īsā al-bābī al-ḥalabī, 1957), vol. 8, p. 3105.

[12] Ibid. Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1998), vol. 3, pp.344-345. Prior to Ibn Kathīr, earlier *mufassirūn* such as Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Bayḍāwī and others do not discuss the verse in connection with war against the Byzantines. Even the Muslim historian Ibn Isḥāq, in his account on what happened before the raid on Tabūk, does not state or imply that Muḥammad was responding to a military action on the part of the Byzantines. Nor does he explain Q.2:29 any further in respect of context of revelation. However, Ibn Isḥāq reports that "When the Prophet reached Tabuk, Yuhanna ibn Ru'ba, governor of Ayla, came and made a treaty with him and paid him *jizya*." See Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra al-Nabī,* ed., Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktaba Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīḥ, 1963), vol. 4, p. 952.

khāṣatan)."[13] Riḍā seems to be more concerned with the nature of fighting, rather than against whom the fighting was conducted. On this matter, he cites his mentor Muḥammad 'Abduh that "fighting is mandatory in Islam, but it was initiated for the purpose of defending the truth and protecting the propagation (*da'wa*)…. All of the battles conducted by the Prophet and the Companions were for defense. But various battles that took place afterward were for power, whereas Islam is an example of mercy and justice."[14]

One may ask how fighting against the Byzantines was for self-defense. Other Muslim reformers like Abul Kalam Azad emphasize the self-defense nature in order to limit the applicability of the doctrine of fighting. According to Azad, Q.9:29 was revealed to Muḥammad when the Roman Empire entered into an agreement with the Gassanid Christians to eliminate the new Medinan state of Islam. The Prophet received the information that the Roman Emperor had had issued from the Constantinople an order to his army to march on Medina and that the Christian tribes of Arabia were to join the Roman forces. The situation was fraught with danger and Muḥammad had to make the necessary preparation to meet. For Azad, Q.9:29 and other verses of sūra al-Tawba "called upon Muslims to defend themselves against a powerful foe."[15] Therefore, Azad concludes, when taken in its historical context, the verse does not assert that it is reasonable to open war against the People of the Book just because of their belief.

This leads us to discuss a difficult question facing the Muslim exegetes, namely, how does the verse call the People of the Book as not believing in God and the Day of Judgment? As mentioned earlier, Q.9:29 describes the People of the Book with three negative attributes (*ṣifāt*

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[13] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: Dār al-manār, 1947), vol. 10, p. 332.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* trans. Dr. Syed Abdul Latif (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967), vol. 3, p. 22.

salabiyya): (1) they do not believe in God and the Last Day, (2) do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and (3) they do not follow the religion of truth (*dīn al-ḥaqq*). Richard Bell contends that the phrase "*min al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*," which is usually translated "the People of the Book," might have been a later insertion.[16] Muslim reformers must have been in a difficult position to explain the verse because Jews and Christians are hardly peoples "who do not believe in God and the Last Day." For some exegetes, however, these negative attributes open room for interpretive maneuvers. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for instance, as cited by Rashīd Riḍā, has his imaginary interlocutor asked the following question: What is your opinion about the fate of Jews who believe in the unity of God (*muwaḥḥida al-yahūd*)? Rāzī responds to the question in this way: "We say that those Jews are not included within the scope of this verse. Nevertheless, they have to pay *jizya* because once the *jizya* is applied to some of them, it should be applicable to all."[17] Here we can see that Rāzī restricts the general applicability of the doctrine of war against the People of the Book. The problem is that the three negative attributes can be interpreted differently.

Riḍā mentions two possible meanings of "they do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden." Firstly, that they do not forbid what is forbidden in Islamic law (*sharī'a*); and secondly, that they do not forbid what is forbidden in Mosaic law. He then alludes

[16] In the footnote of his translation of the verse Richard Bell asserts "The position of this phrase [*al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*] suggests that it may have been interpolated, or that the verse, originally earlier, has been added to at the end." See Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), vol.1, p. 177. Commenting on this suggestion, Jørgen Bæk Simonsen notes: "Bell's view is supported by the fact that it was not until later that the main opponents of the Islamic State were Christians. Apart from a few scattered Jewish settlements and the Christians in Najrān, the main enemy of Arabia had surrendered to Medina at the time of the revelation of sūra 9, but there were still some tribes that had not entered Pax Islamica. These were the ones meant by this verse." See Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, "Administration in the Islamic State: an Interpretation of the terms '*Dhimma*' and '*Jizya*'," in Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari (eds.) *Islam: State and Society* (London: Curzon Press, 1988), p. 87.

[17] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* p. 334; Cf. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-turāth al-'arabī, 1980), vol. 16, p. 28. For a discussion of Rāzī's view, see Jane McAuliffe, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on *āyat al-jizya* and *āyat al-sayf*," pp. 103-119.

to two well-known nineteenth-century exegetes: the Iraqi Abū al-Thanā' al-Alūsī (d.1954) and the Indian Muḥammad Siddiq Hasan Khan (d.1890). The former supports the first view and argues that what is meant by "His Messenger" in the verse is Muḥammad. The latter, on the other hand, holds the second view in such a way that he claims that Jews and Christian do not forbid what God has forbidden in their scriptures. In a similar vein, the third attribute ("they do not follow the religion of truth") is interpreted as either they do not acknowledge the truth of Islam, or they do not follow their true religion.[18]

Are the three negative attributes sufficient causes for fighting against the People of the Book? For Riḍā, the question must be reformulated differently because the verse "describes the People of the Book with three negative attributes as a cause (*'illa*) of their animosity toward Islam,"[19] which in turn leads to the divine order to fight against them. The Indonesian reformer Hamka elaborates this issue in more detail taking into account the circumstance under which the verse was revealed. He begins by saying the phrase "*al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*" in Q.9:29 as referring specifically to Jews and Christians. "The main intention of the verse is not to initiate a war against the People of the Book," Hamka claims, "and until today there is no intention to fight them."[20] When Muḥammad came to Medina, formerly called Yathrib, Hamka further argues, he first established an agreement to live harmoniously with his Jewish neighbors. But the latter broke the agreement by allying with the Meccan Quraysh to destroy the new-born religion, which led to the punishment of Jews there. Hamka claims that Muḥammad and his Muslim community's relations with Christians were harmonious at the beginning. However, the Christians of northern Arabia under the Roman Empire expressed their resentment about the

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[18] Ibid., p. 339.
[19] Ibid., pp. 332-333.
[20] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nurul Islam, 1966), vol. 10, p. 163.

emergence of the Muslim community at Medina. An example of their animosity to Islam was that they killed al-Ḥārith ibn ʻUmayr al-Azdī who was carrying a letter from Muḥammad to the ruler of Basra.[21] "Since the fourth year after the *hijra*," Hamka says, "the people of Medina had felt the threats coming from the north side."[22]

The Muslim sources describe Muḥammad receiving the news that the Byzantines were gathering troops and threatening to attack Medina.[23] That was the cause of the battle of Tabūk, which, according to Azad, "lies on the way to Damascus about 610 kilometers from Medina."[24] Under such a circumstance, Hamka further states, Q.9:29 was revealed. Muḥammad was commanded to prepare a war against them, the Roman Empire, with a full power. He mobilized to face the rumored invasion, and a force was organized and dispatched north to Tabūk, where the Byzantines were rumored to be massing.[25] What Hamka does not tell us is the fact that when they arrived there was no sign of Byzantine presence in the area. It seems that the information Muḥammad received was exaggerated and he decided to return to Medina. Of course, all of these episodes were only mentioned in the Muslim sources. As Walter E. Kaegi rightly notes, "The Byzantine sources offer no clarification about these plausible events, which probably took place after the conclusion of Heraclius' pilgrimage to Jerusalem, when screening Byzantine forces may have been removed or thinned out at the Transjordanian region."[26]

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[21] Ibid., p. 165. On this, see also M.A. Muhibbu-Din, "*Ahl al-kitāb* and Religious Minorities in the Islamic State: Historical Context and Contemporary Challenges," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20/1 (2000), p. 116.
[22] Ibid., p. 164.
[23] See Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), vol. 3, pp. 989-1022; Ṭabarī, *The Last Years of the Prophet,* trans. Ismail K. Poonawala (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 47-62.
[24] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 21.
[25] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 10, p. 166.
[26] Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 83.

In this context, Hamka wants to make three points. First, war is not the norm of Muslim-non-Muslim relationship. The verse under discussion, according to Hamka, does not envisage violent treatments of non-Muslims because of their belief, but rather their false belief caused them to show animosity to Islam and Muslims. Second, the Christians of northern Arabia expressed their animosity to Islam in support of their Byzantine colonial potentate: "they became more Romans than Romans themselves."[27] Hamka finds a similar situation during the colonial experience in Indonesia. Some local kings (*sultan*) and government district officers (*bupati*) pursued and made alliances with the Dutch at the time when there emerged a movement to resist the colonial power and struggle for independence. Third, even in such a conflictual situation, according to Hamka, the verse makes it clear that the purpose of fighting is not to eliminate their religion, "because it is impossible to eliminate a belief through violence."[28] Instead, from Tabūk, Muḥammad managed to set up alliances with a Christian tribe and a Jewish one: they kept their respective religions and accepted to pay *jizya* in exchange for their protection by the Muslim community against attack.

The question of *jizya* occupies a great deal of attention among Muslim exegetes. It is understandable because, in contrast to all the other conditions attaching to non-Muslims' recognition as *dhimmī*s, the *jizya* is the only one that is explicitly ordained by the Qur'ān. It must be pointed out, however, that *jizya* was never consistently imposed on *dhimmī*s throughout history, and there is considerable disagreement among scholars on whether the *jizya* was separated from other types of tax, such as *kharāj* (land tax).[29] Both the Qur'ān and the prophetic

[27] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 10, p. 166.
[28] Ibid., p. 167.
[29] According to Muslim tradition, some tribes in Syria during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb declined to pay *jizya*, which they contended meant humiliation for them. 'Umar then asked them to pay zakat instead of *Jizya*. See

traditions are silent on several important issues concerning the details of *jizya* application. In addition, historical reports suggest contradicting application.[30] From Q.9:29 we learn that *jizya* seems to be an integral part of the *dhimma* agreement in the sense that it is a form of taxation of non-Muslim subjects in return for services rendered by the state. This understanding may lead to an interesting discussion concerning the identity of those from whom *jizya* could be accepted.

Before proceeding to this question, let us first discuss the origins of *jizya* as expounded by Muslim reformers. Qāsimī opens the possibility that *jizya* is an Arabicized word (*mu‘arrab*), originated from the Persian *gizyat*.[31] However, he makes no further elaboration. Riḍā's discussion of this issue is primarily based on a careful study conducted by the Indian thinker

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Balādūrī, *The Origins of Islamic State (Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān),* trans. Philip Khuri Hitti, (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), pp. 284-286 284. The Muslim sources suggest that the term "jizya" had acquired the special sense of poll tax long before the time of Muslim conquest both within and without Arabia. For scholars like Julius Wellhausen, however, that is not the case. Wellhausen argues that land tax (*kharāj*) and poll tax (*jizya*) were used interchangeably, both mean the same, namely the tribute of non-Muslims. "There is frequent mention of the *jizya* of the land, but just as frequent mention of the *kharāj* of a person." According to Wellhausen, the distinction between these two taxes as poll tax (*jizya*) and land tax (*kharāj*) was a later distinction made by jurists and applied to early Muslim practice. Before this distinction was made, *dhimmī*s who adopted Islam were entitled to be freed from all tribute, and this caused the decline of revenue collected by the Arabs. To prevent a decline in revenue, the governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, reimposed the full tribute burdens on the converts, driving them out of the towns and back to their lands. The pious caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz proposed a reform tax in such a way that converts would be freed of poll tax but must pay land tax. In other words, *kharāj* was collected from all land, regardless of the person who owned it, whether a *dhimmī* or convert. See Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom and Its Fall,* trans. Margaret Graham Weir (Beirut: Khayats, 1963), pp. 265-311. Wellhausen's theory has been accepted by several scholars such as Carl Becker and Prince Caetani, but rejected by Daniel C. Dennett. The latter argues that there was no uniform rule of taxation, although he does not refute Wellhausen's main thesis that *kharāj* and *jizya* were not separated until a later time. See Daniel C. Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). More recent studies by Jørgen Simonsen suggest the discrepancy between the classical theory of *jizya* and the early practice. See Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, *Studies in the Genesis and Early Development of Caliphal Taxation System with Special References to Circumstances in the Arab Peninsula, Egypt and Palestine* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1988).

[30] The *jizya* paid by the Christians of Najrān is a case in point. From the time of Muḥammad through the Umayyads, they were to pay different amounts of *jizya*. For a detail discussion on this, see Balādūrī, *The Origins of Islamic State*, pp. 98-105. On this, Abdullah Saeed rightly notes that "Closer examination of what was actually occurring during the early period of the Islamic caliphate shows that there was no uniform practice in relation to non-Muslims. Apart from the general applicable rulings which would guide the relationship of non-Muslims to the caliphate, the treatment the non-Muslims received varied to a certain extent from caliph to caliph and depended on a particular caliph's temperament and preference." However, Saeed does not elaborate what he meant by "the general applicable rulings." See Abdullah Saeed, "Rethinking Citizenship Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State: Rashīd al-Ghannūshī's Contribution to the Evolving Debate," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10/3 (1999), p. 308.

[31] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 8, p. 3106.

Shaykh Shiblī Nuʻmānī (d.1914) who published his article entitled "al-Jizya fī al-Islām" in Riḍā's Journal, *al-Manār*. In his article, Nuʻmānī argues that the *jizya* had been practiced in Persia since the time of Kisrā Anūshirwān (531-579 C.E.), the emperor of Persia. It was a kind of capitation tax or poll tax, payment of which amounted to a badge of degradation and a mark of social inferiority. Nuʻmānī then refers to the historian Ṭabarī who asserts that Anūshirwān demanded a tax from his non-warring subjects for the defense of the country. The emperor was of the opinion that as the soldiers fought and risked their lives for the defense of the country, they, in turn, deserved something from the public. For this reason, he imposed a tax on the people which, as time passed, came to be known as *jizya*.[32]

It seems clear to Riḍā that Muslims were not the first to introduce such a tax. Even the *dhimma*, according to N.J. Coulson, was not Islamic in origin: it developed from existing practices, embodied "the notion of *fides* in Roman law," and "was modeled largely on the position of the non-citizen groups in the Eastern Roman Empire."[33] I should add that a recent study by Nasim Hasan Shah tends to support the view that poll tax was not unfamiliar to the Hindus. Hasan Shah writes, "Under the Gaharwar dynasty of Kanauj, a tax called *turushkadanda* was levied either on the Hindus to defend the kingdom from Muslims, or on Muslims who were resident in the Kingdom."[34] Anyway, after citing Nuʻmānī's study, Riḍā concludes: "Those who reflect on these texts carefully would see that *jizya* was inherited (*ma'thūra*) from the king Kisrā, and the Islamic *sharīʻa* was not the first to promulgate this tax law."[35] Since both *dhimma* and *jizya* were not originated from Islam, one may ask whether they are religiously sanctioned rules

[32] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 10, pp. 343-345. Cf. Shiblī Nuʻmānī, "*al-Jizya fī al-Islām*," *al-Manār* 1 (1898): pp. 848-851.
[33] N.J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), p. 27.
[34] Nasim Hasan Shah, "The Concept of *al-Dhimmah* and the Rights and Duties of *Dhimmī*s in an Islamic State," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 9/2 (1988): p. 220.
[35] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, p. 345.

or merely political practice in certain circumstances. Riḍā and other Muslim reformers examined in this dissertation do not offer any explanation. Recently, however, some progressive Muslim scholars advocate discarding the concept of *dhimma* and *jizya* altogether because "the Islamic justifications for the *dhimma* are weak and the *jizya* was not an Islamic invention but one that existed before Islam."[36]

One of those modern scholars who call for the abolition of both *dhimma* and *jizya* from the Islamic political vocabulary is the Egyptian writer Fahmī Huwaydī who wrote a book entitled "*Muwāṭinūn lā dhimmīyūn*" (Citizens not *Dhimmī*s). In this book, Huwaydī strongly argues that the *dhimma* was a political institution rather than simply a religious one, and with the emergence of nation states this concept is no longer relevant. Huwaydī contends that the *dhimma* as a political concept has been overtaken by the concept of citizenship. The same applies to the *jizya*, says Huwaydī, because this poll tax was not even originated from Islam, but rather borrowed from the experience of other nations for practical purposes.[37] Huwaydī criticizes Ibn Qayyim for interpreting the phrase *'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn* to mean humiliation (*idhlāl*) and degradation (*ṣighār*). Such an interpretation, Huwaydī contends, isolates the verse from the basic principles that have been established by Islam, including the Islamic attitude to the dignity of human beings and respectful treatment of the People of the Book. He then concludes that "Ibn Qayyim's interpretation of the verse is a big mistake (*khata' jasīm*) because it is not possible to separate the verse and interpret it in such a way that is repugnant to the basic principles of Islam."[38] It is worthwhile that Huwaydī reinforces his view by referring to Rashīd Riḍā, saying that "Shaykh

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[36] Rachel M. Scott, "Contextual Citizenship in Modern Islamic Thought," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18/1 (2007), p. 8.
[37] See Fahmī Huwaydī, *Muwāṭinūn lā Dhimmīyyūn* (Beirut: Dār al-shurūq, 1985), pp. 110-146.
[38] Ibid., p. 140.

Rashīd Riḍā has expressed his concern about this when he said: 'among the *mufassirūn* there are those who said many things that are rejected by the Islamic concept of justice and mercy.'"[39]

Interestingly, Qāsimī comes out in defense of Ibn Qayyim or at least he cites the latter approvingly. Ibn Qayyim wrote a comprehensive book on the legal status of *dhimmī*s entitled *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma,* which, according to Birgit Krawietz, is without doubt the main late-medieval reference regarding religious minorities in the Islamic lands.[40] As "the mouthpiece of the early Damascene Salafiyya" (to use Iztchak Weismann's term),[41] Qāsimī's reference to Ibn Qayyim is understandable because the latter, along with his teacher Ibn Taymiyya, is one of the central figures upon whom most Salafis rely. But, it is also important to note that Qāsimī places Ibn Qayyim among those who oppose the *dhimmī* payment of *jizya* as being a kind of punishment and humiliation. Here I quote Qāsimī's explanation:

> Suyūṭī said: Based on the phrase "*wa-hum ṣāghirūn*" (Q.9:29), some argue that *jizya* should be taken with humiliation (*ihāna*), thus the collector sits while the *dhimmī* stands, nods his head and lowers his back, and he then puts the *jizya* on the scale, while the collector holds his beard and slaps him. Suyūṭī then said: This is rejected by Nawawī, saying that such an interpretation is wrong and evil.
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> I (Qāsimī) said: Indeed, Nawawī is right in such a way that that interpretation is not only wrong but also contradicted by the tolerance of this religion and its well-known mercy. I also noticed that Ibn Qayyim rejects such a view, saying that: There is no evidence whatsoever for such an interpretation. It was never reported or related that the Prophet or his companions ever did that. [Ibn Qayyim] said: The correct interpretation is that "sighār" is brought about by undertaking to be ruled according to the prescription of

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[39] Ibid. Huwaydī argues that Ibn Qayyim's attitude to non-Muslims was in response to the aggression of non-Muslims towards Islam during the period of the Crusades and the invasion of the Mongols to the Arab lands. See p. 132. In line with this, AbdulHameed AbuSulayman notes: "Ibn Qayyim's position could be explained on three grounds: First, the cumulative effect of centuries of tension in communal relationships within Muslim territories; second, the effects of Mongol and Crusader invasions, and third, the general confusion in understanding the theoretical bases of Islam." See AbuSulayman, "Al-Dhimmah and Related Concepts in Historical Perspective," p. 10.

[40] Birgit Krawietz, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: His Life and Works," *Mamluk Studies Review* 10/2 (2006): pp. 19-64.

[41] See Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 143.

> Islam and their consent to pay the *jizya*. Taking that upon themselves is the humility, and that is the view of Shāfi'ī.[42]

I cite this extensively in order to demonstrate how, in contrast to contemporary scholars like Huwaydī, Qāsimī expresses his appreciative attitude to Ibn Qayyim as the one who advocated an interpretation of *wa-hum ṣāghirūn* in line with the basic principles of Islamic mission, namely, justice and mercy. While Huwaydī accuses Ibn Qayyim of overemphasizing conflicts and animosities between Muslims and non-Muslims, in Qāsimī's eyes Ibn Qayyim promotes a more nuanced and tolerant attitude toward non-believers than is sometimes supposed. Of course, it is not uncommon in Muslim intellectual history that the views of earlier authorities are interpreted differently by later scholars to support their particular position. It must be pointed out, however, that a closer examination of Ibn Qayyim's *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma* reveals that Qāsimī quotes him out of context. Ibn Qayyim discusses at length whether the *jizya* was intended for the protection of the People of the Book (*'āṣima li-dam*) or for their punishment (*'uqūba*), and he is certainly inclined to the latter view.[43]

Let us now examine how Qāsimī refers to Ibn Qayyim on the question of who should pay the *jizya*. In this context, Qāsimī presents him as even more open to diversity than Rashīd Riḍā. The Egyptian reformer tends to argue that *jizya* is only accepted from the People of the Book. It is true that Riḍā extends the title "ahl al-kitāb" to include not only Jews and Christians, but also Zoroastrians (*majūs*) and other people who might have scriptures. However, Riḍā explicitly claims that *jizya* cannot be accepted from Arab polytheists (*mushrikū al-'arab*). There are only

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[42] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 8, p. 3108. Cf. Ibn Qayyim, *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma* (Damascus: Maṭba'a jāmi'a Dimasq, 1961), vol.1, pp. 23-24. As for *'an yadin*, Qāsimī opens the possibility that the phrase can be understood differently, such as "*istislām*" (submission), "*naqd*" (in cash), "*jāriḥa ḥaqīqiyya*" (physical degradation), "*dhill*" (humiliation), and "*ni'ma*" (blessing). He provides evidences for each one of these possibilities, including poetry. See pp. 3106-3107.

[43] See Ibn Qayyim, *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma*, vol. 1, pp. 15-25.

two options available for them: Islam or death. He classifies non-believers into four categories: First, Arab polytheists: the *jizya* is not accepted from them. Second, Jews and Christians of various sects and denominations: the *jizya* is accepted from them. Third, Zoroastrians and Sabeans: the *jizya* is also accepted from them. Fourth, for those other than the three groups, there should be decided by the Muslim rulers according to public interests (*maṣlaḥa*).[44] Of course, Riḍā's classification is more advanced than that of the majority of *fuqahā'* (Muslim jurists) who usually grouped the fourth category within the *mushrikūn* (polytheists) to be fought until either accepting Islam or being killed.[45]

Qāsimī asserts that Ibn Qayyim allows the acceptance of *jizya* from all non-believers, including Arab polytheists. Ibn Qayyim argues that *jizya* was not collected from Arab polytheists because there were no more polytheists after the revelation of this verse. Recall that the verse was revealed after the conquest of Mecca (*fatḥ Makka*) and the people entered Islam in crowds. "Those who reflect on the biography [of the Prophet] and the early development of Islam," he further argues, "would understand that *jizya* was not collected at the time because the Arab polytheists were not found, not because they were not people from whom the *jizya* should be taken."[46] Another argument put forth by Ibn Qayyim is that there is no difference between Zoroastrians who worshipped fire and Arab polytheists who worshipped idols. He reminds the reader that the worshippers of fire were enemies of the Prophet Abraham. He then concludes, "If

[44] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 10, pp. 352-353.
[45] Patricia Crone rightly notes that the Muslim jurists treat the People of the Book and the polytheists differently based on Q.9:29 and the uncompromising verses such as Q.9:5 and 8:29. She notes that "It would in fact have been easier for them simply to lay down that all infidels without exception were to be given the choice between Islam and death…. But the jurists did not want so draconian a rule, so they chose to overlook the problematic aspect of the first verse and to limit the application of the two uncompromising verses to pagans." See Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 370.
[46] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 8, p. 3109; Cf. Ibn Qayyim, *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma*, vol. 1, pp. 6-7.

the *jizya* was taken from them, it should be even preferred to be taken from worshippers of idols."[47]

Qāsimī continues discussing Ibn Qayyim's view on the rate of *jizya* and argues that there is no fixed rate (*ghayr muqaddar*) for non-believers to pay. When the Prophet sent Mu'ādh to Yemen, he asked him to collect one *dīnār* from each adult man who could afford to pay.[48] The point to make here is that *jizya* should not be a burden upon non-Muslims. Qāsimī notes that whereas non-Muslims had to pay one single *dīnār* a year as *jizya*, Muslims had to pay *zakāt* (a far greater tax), which was not levied on the People of the Book, and served in the army to defend the state. When non-Muslims did serve in the army, they were exempted from *jizya*. Thus, *jizya* per se does not have any insinuations or consequences of a person being a second class citizen. He also cites Abū Yūsuf (d.182/789) addressing the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r.786-809) as follows:

> It is appropriate, O Commander of the Faithful, that you should treat with leniency those under the protection of our Prophet Muḥammad, and not to allow that more than what is due to be taken from them or more than they are able to pay, and that nothing should be confiscated from their properties without legal justification.[49]

On the purpose of *jizya*, Qāsimī refers to the grand mufti of Egypt Muḥammad 'Abduh who discusses the nature of military expansion in his book *al-Islām wa al-Naṣrāniyya.* 'Abduh argues that even in the situation of war, Islam only conquered lands to be under its authority and then left the inhabitants on their own religion and belief. They were to pay *jizya* in return for their being protected in their religion, property, and dignity. 'Abduh contends that only after Islam became weak that Muslims started deviated from the principle of harmonious relations

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[47] Ibid., pp. 3109-3110.
[48] Ibid., p. 3110.
[49] Ibid., p. 3112. Cf. Abu Yusuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj (Taxation in Islam)*, trans. A. Ben Shemesh, (Leiden: Brill 1969), vol. 3, p. 85.

with non-Muslim subjects.[50] In his magnum opus, *Risāla al-tawḥīd,* ʻAbduh attempts to prove that the early rapid expansion of Islam was not a disaster for the population of the conquered lands. "When the distresses of war were spent and sovereignty passed to the victor," ʻAbduh claims, "Islam treated the vanquished with kindly gentleness, allowed them to maintain their religions and their rites in security and peace."[51] In highly an apologetic tone, he compares with non-Muslim conquest as follows:

> When non-Muslim powers conquered a kingdom they used to follow the army of conquest with an army of preachers of their faith, who took up quarters in the houses and occupied their councils, in order to impose the conqueror's religion. It was not so with Muslim victors: such things were quite unknown in all their history. There were no preachers with official and special duty to undertake propaganda and give their whole energies to urging their creed on non-Muslims. Instead the Muslims contented themselves with mixing among other peoples and treating them kindly. The entire world witnessed that Islam counted the proper treatment of conquered peoples a meritorious and virtuous thing, whereas Europeans regards such behaviors as weak and despicable.[52]

The idea that *jizya* was intended as a means by which to maintain peace rather than generate hostility can also be found in Abu Kalam Azad's *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān.* For Azad, one of the main objectives of *jizya* was to facilitate a peaceful solution to hostility. Non-Muslims who engaged in fighting against Muslims were thereby given the option of making peace by agreeing to pay the *jizya*. In this sense, *jizya* is seen as a means by which to legalize the cessation of war and military conflict with non-Muslims. In line with Qāsimī, Azad argues that *jizya* should be accepted from all non-believers, either the People of the Book or polytheists. "The opinion which

[50] See Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 8, p.3113. Cf. Muḥammad ʻAbduh, *al-Islām wa al-Naṣrāniyya maʻa al-ʻilm wa al-madaniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-ḥadātha, 1977), pp. 84-85.

[51] Muḥammad ʻAbduh, *Risāla al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: Maṭbaʻa Muḥammad ʻAlī Ṣabīḥ, 1966), pp. 139-140.

[52] Ibid., p. 140. ʻAbduh especially responds to those who claim that Islam was only expanded at this pace by dint of the sword, in which the Muslim conquerors were portrayed as having the Qur'an in one hand and the sword in the other. For ʻAbduh, such an accusation is "a great slander" (*buhtān ʻaẓīm*). According to ʻAbduh, the Muslims only used the sword in self-defanse and in retaliation against aggression. Were the sword to propagate religion, he argues further, the pursuit of such violent methods of compulsion would constitute a threat to every nation not accepting it. See p. 145.

prevailed was to the effect that no distinction should be made in this respect," he claims.[53] Why was this injunction of *jizya* issued at all? In response to this question, Azad emphasizes the point that *jizya* was levied in lieu of military service. The idea behind the imposition of *jizya*, Azad argues, was that all citizens share the same burden of responsibility in the administration of the state. The Prophet imposed on the Muslims compulsory military, while the non-Muslims "were not compelled to do military service but were left to them to decide whether to join the military service or not. They were free to undertake military service, but if they cared to abstain from doing so, they were expected to share in some manner the military expenses of the state."[54] A number of historians, including Ṭabarī and Balādūrī, Azad contends, have recorded that *jizya* was not collected from the non-Muslim population whenever they chose to join the military forces of the state.[55] It is worthwhile that in early Islam, as Thomas W. Arnold notes, even Muslims were made to pay a tax if they were exempted from military service, like the non-Muslims.[56]

Azad discusses at length the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of Q.9:29 to emphasize that "the order to fight the People of the Book is limited in its application. It does not mean that the Muslim should fight every Jew and Christian, whenever he found, in any part of the world till they embrace Islam or pay *jizya*, as is the perverted view of the hostile critics of Islam."[57] To suggest that Islam promotes indiscriminate opposition to the People of the Book, Azad argues, is to ignore the primary mission of Muḥammad as a blessing for all universe (*raḥmatan lil-ʻālamīn*) and to

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[53] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 87.
[54] Ibid., 87.
[55] Ibid., p. 88.
[56] Arnolds writes: "[W]hen the Egyptian peasants, although Muslim in faith, were made exempt from military service, a tax was imposed upon them as on the Christians, in lieu thereof." See Thomas W. Arnolds, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1913), pp. 62-63.
[57] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 85.

ignore the nobility of disposition displayed towards the Jews and the Christians by the Companions. He then concludes his explication of the verse by referring to the French scholar Gustave Le Bon (the author of *La civilisation des Arabes* [1884]) who observes "that despite the fact that the incidence of taxation fell more heavily on a Muslim than a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim was free to enjoy equally well with every Muslim all the privileges afforded to the citizens of the state. The only privilege that was reserved for the Muslims was the seat of the caliphate, and this, because of certain religious functions attached to it, which could not naturally be discharged by a non-Muslim."[58] The German scholar Adam Mez also remarks that the most amazing feature of the Islamic government was the number of non-Muslim officers in the state service.[59] I have discussed at length elsewhere that a large number of non-Muslim *dhimmī*s were employed during 'Abbāsid times to the extent that some of them were able to achieve the second highest office after the caliph: the vizier.[60]

The question remains: How is the verse under discussion related to other verses that seemingly allow for religious freedom, such as 2:256: "There is no compulsion in religion (*lā ikhrāha fī al-dīn*)." It is remarkable that most Muslim reformers interpret Q.9:29 in conjunction with 2:256 but not in terms of abrogation, but in terms of how the latter should color our understanding of the former. In fact, the notion of abrogation is absent in their discussion of 9:29 and 2:256. Before we continue our discussion of reformist Muslim approaches to the relation of the two verses, two observations are in order. First, some Muslim commentators contend that 2:256 was initially applied to all people, but it was eventually abrogated by 9:29 with regard to

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[58] Ibid., pp. 88-89.
[59] See Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam,* trans. Salahudin Khuda Bukhsh and D.S. Margoliouth (London: Luzac and Co., 1937).
[60] See Mun'im Sirry, "The Public Role of *Dhimmī*s during 'Abbāsid Times," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74/2 (2011): pp. 187-204.

the People of the Book and by 9:73 with regard to the polytheists.[61] Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās (d.338/950) who wrote a book on this subject entitled *al-Nāsikh wa al-mansūkh* holds that 9:29 abrogates all verses calling for patience or forgiveness toward the People of the Book.[62] Second, even if 2:256 is not abrogated by 9:29, it seems that Muslim exegetes have interpreted it differently to limit its general applicability. Jane McAuliffe argues "there is no pretense that the prohibition of religious compulsion has universal applicability."[63] She refers to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī who contends that the intended scope of *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* is limited within what is meant by *al-dīn* (with definite article [*al*-]), "as God's religion, [which] may include the scriptural tradition prior to Islam, but it certainly does not include the *mushrikūn*'s idolatry."[64] Thus, according to McAuliffe, the commonly rendering of the verse as "There is no compulsion in religion" is misleading, because "[b]y dropping the definite article in English, one loses the intended specificity."[65]

Most Muslim reformers whose *tafsīr*s discussed in this dissertation recognize the tension between Q. 9:29 and 2:256, and solve it not through the notion of *nāsikh wa mansūkh*, but rather through universalizing the applicability of the latter and particularizing the former. The Shī'ī Lebanese scholar Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya formulates the tension as follows: "If it is true that Islam does not compel someone to Islam, then why does it command the killing of the People of the Book until they pay the *jizya*?"[66] His response to this question is that "fighting against the People of the Book is a specific matter (*amr khāṣṣ*) that relates to those in Arabia due

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[61] See Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 102.
[62] For a brief discussion on this, see Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: the Origin of Holy War in Islam*, pp. 64 and 156.
[63] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on *āya al-jizyah* and *āyāt al-sayf*," p. 112.
[64] Ibid., p. 113.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif* (Beirut: Dār al-'ilm lil-malāyīn, 1968), vol. 4, p. 32.

to a particular reason (*li-sabab khāṣṣ*)."[67] Mughniyya discusses briefly this particular reason, namely that the People of Book made alliance with the polytheists (*mushrikūn*) to wage a war against the believers. This conclusion is based on the context of the revelation of Q.9:29 as discussed earlier. In his exegesis of Q.2:256, Mughniyya makes it clear that "Islam allows fighting [against non-Muslims] for specific reasons and it is not permitted for any Muslim wherever and whenever (*kā'inan man kāna*) to kill for the sake of proclaiming Islam."[68] In light of this general applicability of Q.2:256, he interprets the prophetic tradition "I have been ordered to fight people until they say 'There is no god but God'" as specific to Muḥammad. He paraphrases this tradition as follows: "Surely I fight them when I myself, or whoever stand on my behalf, see that the interest of humanity (*maṣlaḥa al-insāniyya*) necessitates fighting for the sake of 'There is no god but God.' But, no one is allowed to fight in order to compel others to say 'There is no god but God.'"[69]

Ṭabaṭabā'ī offers a similar explanation, especially in his exegesis of Q.2:256. He begins his discussion by addressing the question of why there is no compulsion in religion. He asserts that religion is a set of truths which are believed in, and some of them are then acted upon. Thus, religion is a matter of belief and conscience, and such a thing cannot be imposed by coercion and compulsion. In his view, Q.2:256 is "one of the verses that show that Islam is not based on the sword and killing, and that it does not allow Muslims to compel or coerce others to accept Islam. It is contrary to the view held by many writers and commentators that Islam is the religion of the sword. They base their assertion on the notion of jihad as one of the pillars of Islam."[70]

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., vol. 1, 396.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-a'lāmi lil-maṭbū'āt, 1980), vol. 2, p. 343.

Ṭabaṭabā'ī emphasizes the point that that fighting is not ordained in Islam for the purpose of spreading religion through power and coercion, but rather for "reviving the truth and defending the most precious treasure of nature: the faith of monotheism (*tawḥīd*)."[71]

The Iranian scholar specifically addresses the question of *nāsikh wa mansūkh*, arguing that "The verse 'there is no compulsion in religion' is not abrogated by the verse of the sword, although some writers think so."[72] His argument is based on the internal evidence of the verse itself, that is, the phrase that comes after *lā ikrāha fi al-dīn*, namely *qad tabayyana al-rushd min al-ghayy* (Truth has stood out clear from error). This phrase, according to Ṭabaṭabā'ī, gives the reason for the prohibition of compulsion, because "there is no need for compulsion in an important matter whose advantages and disadvantages are clearly defined and the reward and punishment of accepting and rejecting are well-explained."[73] In other words, the reason why "there is no compulsion in religion" is because "truth has become clear from error," and this distinction between truth and error is as valid after the revelation of the verse of the sword as it was before that. Therefore, he concludes, "So long as the reason for no compulsion in religion is valid the rule remains valid."[74]

It seems clear that Muslim reformers suggest that the Qur'ānic verses that detract from or contradict the principle of "no compulsion in religion" should be applied only in specific circumstances. However, they do not go as far as to revisit the applicability of *dhimmī* status and *jizya* in the modern nation states. It may be argued that all of these reformers experienced life in one way or another under Western colonization, and, therefore, their main concern was not to

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., pp. 343-344.
[73] Ibid., p. 344.
[74] Ibid.

reformulate a new principle based on a situation as if Islam was in a position of power. Even though they offer a friendly picture of Islam, they do so primarily in response to the accusation put forth by some commentators that Islam is an intolerant religion, rather than to change the discourse from one of contract (*'aqd*) to one of constitution (*dustūr*) and from *dhimma* to citizenship. It is worth noting, however, that Mughniyya who wrote his *tafsīr* in 1960s and 1970s began to recognize the inapplicability of the classical formulation of the relation between the state and non-Muslim subjects. He contends that the lengthy discussion of *jizya* that early *mufassirūn* and *fuqahā'* have provided is only relevant in their times when Islam had its own state and power. Such a discussion today is a kind of exaggeration (*takthīr kalām*).[75]

Up to this point we have discussed one of the most contentious issues concerning the treatment of non-Muslim subjects in a Muslim society or state, which has occupied much of scholarly attention. However, the question of inter-religious relations is more about the interaction between different religious individuals and communities than between the state and its subjects. In what follows, we move from the state-to-nonMuslim-subject relations to subject-to-subject relations. We shall begin with those passages in the Qur'ān that explicitly prohibit Muslims to take non-Muslims as *awliyā'*. The word *awliyā'* is left in its original Arabic because it has various meanings, such as friends, allies, patrons, guardians, protectors or leaders. The question is: If the Qur'ān promotes a gentle and kind treatment of non-Muslims, why does it prohibit Muslims to take them as *awliyā'*?

[75] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 4, p. 32.

Friendship with the Unbelievers

It is in the general context of Qur'ānic guidelines of peace and harmony that we must see the verses that restrict inter-religious engagements. One of the most quoted verses that seem to oppose what we might term "normative" or "kindly relations" between Muslims and non-Muslims is Q.5:51, which says: "O, you who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as *awliyā'*. They are *awliyā'* to one another, and the one among you who turns to them is of them. Truly, God does not guide wrongdoing folk." The word *awliyā'* has been commonly translated into English as "friends." Given this translation, as Oliver Leaman puts it, "The verse appears to be a very clear statement opposing friendly relations between Muslims, on the one hand, and Jews and Christians, on the other."[76] Johanna Pink is right when noting that this verse not only poses several exegetical problems, the first and foremost of which is the exact meaning of *awliyā'*, but it is also a verse loaded with possible ideological implications concerning the attitude towards the West, the state of Israel, and non-Muslim minorities in Muslim majority societies.[77] However, when examining Muslim discussions of the meaning of *awliyā'* and other related issues, it is mistake to focus on this verse alone because such a prohibition also occurs elsewhere, including those prior to Q.5:51 in the existing Qur'ān. As is well known, the *mufassirūn* often offer a more detailed discussion of the first occurrence than the later one.

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[76] Oliver Leaman, *Jewish Thought: an Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 70.

[77] Johanna Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'ānic Exegesis: Qur'ānic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q.5:51," *Der Welt des Islams* 50 (2010), p. 7. For a brief discussion of this verse, see Jane McAuliffe, "Christians in the Qur'ān and Tafsīr," in Jacques Waardenburgh (ed.) *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 110-112; David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant Islam," in Joseph E.B. Lumbard (ed.) *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2009), pp. 5-8; Haris Aziz, "Anti-Semitism amongst Muslims," in Tahir Abbas (ed.) *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 79-80.

The prohibition of taking non-believers as *awliyā'* occurs several times in the Qur'ān with different identification of non-believers. While Q.5:51 refers explicitly to *al-yahūd* (Jews) and *al-naṣārā* (Christians), in three occurrences (3:28, 4:139 and 4:144) the Qur'ān simply refers to *al-kuffār* (unbelievers). Elsewhere the prohibition applies to "those who take your religion for a mockery and sport" (5:57), "your fathers and brothers" (9:23), "other than God" (13:1629:41, 39:3, 42:9) and "My enemy and your enemy" (6:1). As expected, Muslim reformers devote more detailed discussions to the first occurrence of this prohibition in Q. 3:28 than other verses. Therefore, our discussion focuses on their interpretation of Q. 3:28 and 5:51, although we will also examine other relevant verses as Muslim exegetes usually draw upon the inter-textuality of the Qur'ān in order to develop their interpretation. Some of the questions to discuss are: What is the meaning of *awliyā'*? To what extent does the context of revelation clarify the meaning of *awliyā'* and the nature of prohibition? Whom are the believers forbidden from taking as *awliyā'*? How have Muslim reformers understood the verses in light of inter-religious interactions in the modern context?

In the Qur'ān the word *awliyā'* and its singular *walī* occur eighty-six times and is derived from the root *w-l-y*, which can have numerous meanings depending on its context. All of its related cognates can be said to designate a type of relationship between persons of either equal or unequal statue. It can, for example, be used for the relationship between lord and servant, patron and client, ruler and subject, as well as between paternal relations or friends.[78] Certainly, the meaning of the word *awliyā'* in the Qur'ān is not static, and this is also reflected in the way Muslim reformers understand it. Qāsimī, for instance, seems to understand the meaning of

[78] See Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shī'ī Identity in Early Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 16.

awliyā' differently according to different contexts in the Qur'ān. He opens his discussion of Q.3:28 by recognizing that the word *walī* (singular of *awliyā'*) has numerous meanings, including lover (*muḥibb*), friend (*ṣadīq*), and helper (*nāsir*). However, he understands the verse in terms of *muwālā*, a term denoting friendship, by which he means personal links of affection to an extent that the believers "confide a secret to the unbelievers."[79] While he glosses *awliyā'* in 4:139 as *anṣār* (helpers), Qāsimī explains *muwālā al-kuffār* in 4:144 differently. That is, to be intimate friend to one another, to trust one another, to advise one another, and to communicate internal affairs of the believers to the unbelievers.[80]

Riḍā and Hamka tend to understand *awliyā'* as politically a loaded term. Riḍā speaks of the possibility of applying both *walāya* and *wilāya* to the meaning of *awliyā'*. While both terms (*walāya* and *wilāya*) are indistinguishable in unvocalized text, they are usually understood to refer to different things. According to Riḍā, the former conveys the meaning of guardianship, alliance and assistance (*nuṣra*), and the latter signifies power and authority (*tawallī al-amr*).[81] In most cases, however, he glosses *awliyā'* as helpers. Riḍā relies heavily on his mentor, Muḥammad 'Abduh, in elucidating the meaning of *awliyā'*. The latter looks at the internal restriction in the text of the Qur'ān to argue that prohibition of taking the unbelievers as *awliyā'* is circumscribed. For instance, in Q.3:28, the prohibition is bound with the phrase "*min-dūn al-mu'minīn*" (to the exclusion of the believers), and therefore he paraphrases the verse as "Let not the believers take the unbelievers as *awliyā'* and helpers (*anṣār*) on anything that would allow their interest to prevail over the interest of the believers."[82] Riḍā contends that the prohibition in

[79] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl,* vol. 4, p. 824.
[80] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 1621.
[81] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 5, p. 472.
[82] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 278.

Q.4:139 should be understand in the context of political power in such a way that the believers were warned against setting aside the authority of the believers (*wilāya al-mu'minīn*) and preferring the unbelievers.[83]

The political connotation of *awliyā'* is more evident in Hamka's *tafsīr* in which he consistently interprets *awliyā'* as "leaders" (*pemimpin*). This leads a scholar like Johanna Pink to conclude that Hamka does not discuss "the meaning of the word *walī* or the translation [he] chose for it at all, thus leaving the Indonesian reader with the impression that the word in question has only one unambiguous meaning, i.e. leader."[84] Pink comes to this conclusion because she focuses her discussion on Q.5:51 and ignores Hamka's discussion of the word *walī*/*awliyā'* that occurs earlier in the Qur'ān. The word *awliyā'* first occurs in Q.2:257 and here Hamka discusses at length his reason for choosing "leaders" as an appropriate translation of *awliyā'*. He recognizes that "the word *walī* encompasses a broad range of meanings, including leader, guardian, manager, and so forth."[85] Of all these meanings, he contends, the word *walī* in the historical development of Islamic polity is usually associated with a political position, namely "governor." 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 42/663) was called "walī miṣr" (governor of Egypt) whereas Mu'āwiya (d.60/680) before he became a caliph was called the "walī al-Shām" (governor of Syria). Even in Indonesia, he argues, the General Governor during the Dutch government was called "Walī Negeri," which is the translation of "Landvogd."[86] With this in mind, he prefers to understand *awliyā'* as "leaders," although he seems to open to other meanings as well. In his interpretation of 3:28, for instance, Hamka understands it as "a warning

[83] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 463.
[84] Johanna Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'ānic Exegesis," p. 42.
[85] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 3, p. 32.
[86] Ibid.

to the believers against taking those who are not believing in God as *awliyā'*, either understood in terms of leaders (*pemimpin*) or friends (*sahabat*)."[87]

Unlike Riḍā and Hamka, Ṭabaṭabā'ī rules out the political dimension of *awliyā'*, arguing that such interpretation is not supported by the internal evidence in the Qur'ān. He goes to great lengths to insist that the personalist dimension, "affectionate closeness", is the essence of its meaning.[88] Although the root *w-l-y* denotes authority to manage something, that is, guardianship, Ṭabaṭabā'ī argues, "the word has been used – with increasing frequency – in the context of love and affection; if two people love each other, each feels free to look after the other's affairs as love empowers the beloved to manage the affairs, and influence the life, of the lover."[89] Thus taking the unbelievers as friends means establishing a psychological rapport with them to the extent that such a friendship would taint the believer's vision and adversely affect his thoughts and character.[90] Recognizing that this is a less tolerant reading, he supports his contention with several lines of debate. In particular, he refuses an understanding of *wilāya/walāya* in terms of help or contractual alliance as suggested by some *mufassirūn*.

According to Ṭabaṭabā'ī, some *mufassirūn* oppose interpreting *wilāya* of love and affection because it is not supported by the context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Instead, various narratives of the context of revelation of Q.5:51 seem to support the idea that the verse forbids entering into covenant and *wilāya* of mutual help between the Muslims on the one hand, and the Jews and the Christians on the other. However, the tendency of some *mufassirūn* to bring the context of revelation into discussion is rejected by Ṭabaṭabā'ī, arguing that the narratives of

[87] Ibid., p. 151.
[88] For a brief discussion of Ṭabaṭabā'ī's view, see Jane McAuliffe, "Christians in the Qur'ān and Tafsīr," pp. 111-112; Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberalism and Pluralism: an Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p.
[89] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 151.
[90] Ibid.

asbāb al-nuzūl are contradictory and do not present a single meaning which can be relied upon. For Ṭabaṭabā'ī, those narratives are not only weak but also "merely attempts to apply historical events on the Qur'ānic verses which appear to have some relevance to them."[91] Even if we accept the authenticity of those narratives, he contends, such historical events can not particularize nor restrict the generality of a Qur'ānic verse, otherwise "the Qur'ān would have died with the death of those about whom such verses were revealed."[92]

Among Muslim reformers examined in this study, only Riḍā and Hamka bring a significant number of *asbāb al-nuzūl* narratives into discussion. They mention more than one occasion of revelation for both Q.3:28 and 5:51. As cited by Riḍā, Muḥammad 'Abduh alludes to three occasions for 3:28, namely that the verse was revealed concerning Ḥātib ibn Abī Balta'a, or 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, or a group of Companions who allied with some Jews. However, 'Abduh is quick to note that whatever the reason for its revelation, the verse reflects the early formation of Muslim identity and to ensure a strong in-group commitment God prohibited the believers from taking *awliyā'* among the unbelievers.[93] As for Q.5:51, Riḍā discusses two types of *asbāb al-nuzūl*: general (*sabab 'ām*) and specific (*sabab khās*). By the former he means the hostile surroundings especially among three Jewish tribes in Medina, namely Banū Qaynuqa', Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓa. The Prophet had initiated to live in peace with them by making a pact, Riḍā claims, but they breached the pact and conspired to kill him. It is under such a hostile environment that the prohibition of befriending (*muwālā*) with the People of the Book should be understood.[94]

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 276.
[94] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 424.

With regard to the latter (*sabab khāṣṣ*), Riḍā mentions different, conflicting narratives including the ones rejected by Ṭabaṭabā'ī.[95] Riḍā does not judge on the authenticity of these narratives, a position that is common among earlier *mufassirūn* such as Ṭabarī, who conclude that there is no evidence for the authenticity of any of these stories to the exclusion of the others. It can be safely assumed that the verse relates to a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) who did not want to give up his friendship with Jews or Christians for fear of losing their protection. In any case, Ṭabarī argues, the verse should be interpreted according to its evidence and general meaning, not with specific reference to any occasion of revelation.[96] While Hamka follows Ṭabarī's argument almost to the letter in that the interdiction is in force with respect to all believers at all times, not just in the specific context of revelation, Riḍā contends that the verse should be understood within the general context of its revelation, namely the hostile environment. Thus, for Riḍā, the prohibition of taking the unbelievers as *awliyā'*, whatever this term is to be understood, only applies to such a condition in which they waged a war against the Prophet or against the believers, and they were the ones who showed enmity. He argues that Muḥammad did not fight except against those who conspired to kill him.

[95] The most commonly transmitted of these occasions of revelation is the one related by 'Ubāda ibn Ṣāmit: When Banū Qaynuqā' fought the Prophet, 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl held pact to them and stood by them, while 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit went to the Prophet and renounced their pact before God and His Messenger, he was from Banū 'Awf ibn al-Khazraj, and he had got a covenant with them just as they had got a pact with 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy. So, 'Ubāda renounced them before the Prophet and said: "I love God and His Messenger and the believers, and renounce before God and His Messenger the pact of these unbelievers and their friendship." In another version, while 'Ubāda renounced his pact with Jews, Abdullah ibn Ubayy refused to follow suit for fear of losing his Jewish allies whom he thought he needed for protection. Still another story refers to the Jewish tribe of the Banū Qurayẓa, who were beleaguered and finally surrendered. When they asked Abū Lubāba, a companion of the Prophet, what Muḥammad was going to with them, he gestured at his throat, indicating their execution by beheading. This act of confiding the Prophet's plans to his enemies was resulting in the revelation of Q.5:51. See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, pp. 424-425. See also Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1954), vol. 10, pp. 395-399.

[96] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, p. 399. Ṭabarī says: "*fa al-ṣawāb an yaḥkum li-ẓāhir al-tanzīl bi al-'umūm 'alā mā 'amma*."

There are some contemporary writers who attempt to restrict the general meaning of Q.5:51 by considering closely its occasion of revelation. Haris Aziz, for instance, argues that "*awliyā'* needs to be understood as guardians or patrons in the strict military sense. This is because when this verse was revealed, Muslims were in a precarious position in Medina, with the Meccans planning to attack the Muslims and some of the Christian and Jewish tribes conspiring against the Muslims."[97] In that particular situation, Aziz argues, Muslims were instructed to consolidate themselves and not depend on anyone needlessly. Oliver Leaman makes a similar observation, arguing that "the translation of *awliyā'* as 'friends' is misleading and that it should be rendered perhaps as 'protectors' or 'guardians' in the strict military sense of these terms."[98] Like others who suggest an understanding of *awliyā'* in the strict military sense, David Dakake considers taking the unbelievers as *awliyā'* as a kind of "dissention" in the ranks of the believers. In his own words, "From the perspective of Islam, the Prophet realized that a young community, faced with great peril, could not allow such 'dissention' in the ranks of the faithful as would be created by various individuals making bonds of loyalty with other groups not committed to the Islamic message."[99]

In this context, it must be pointed out that even among Muslim reformers who favor the applicability of the general meaning of verse there are some who make certain qualifications concerning the unbelievers who the believers are forbidden from taking as *awliyā'*. Riḍā, for instance, does not consider the verses as referring to all the unbelievers, but only those who are inimical towards Islam. While interpreting Q.3:28 he makes it clear that Muslims were forbidden from making the unbelievers as *awliyā'* not because they were unbelievers. Rather, "the

[97] Haris Aziz, "Anti-Semitism amongst Muslims," p. 79.
[98] Oliver Leaman, *Jewish Thought: an Introduction*, p. 71.
[99] David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant Islam," p. 8.

prohibition of making friendship and alliance with the enemies of God and His Messenger (*a‘dā’ allāh wa-rasūlihī*) was connected with the fact that their unbelief had led them to expel the Prophet and the believers from their own land."[100] It is forbidden, according to Riḍā, to establish friendship and alliance with every fighting nation (*sha‘b harbī*) that treat the Muslims with enmity. But, at the same time, Muslims are also instructed to treat with kindness and just those who are not hostile to them. Riḍā reinforces his view by citing the following verses:

> It may be that God will bring about love between you and those with whom you have enmity. God is powerful and God is most-forgiving, most merciful.
>
> God does not forbid you as regards those who did not fight you on account of faith, and did not expel you from your homes, that you do good to them and deal justly with them. Surely God loves those who are just (Q.60:7-8).

Riḍā once again cites the above verses when interpreting Q.5:51 to make the point that "the prohibition from establishing friendship (*muwālā*) was because of their enmity and their status as fighters, not because of the difference in religion. When the Prophet made alliance with Jews, he wrote in his contract 'To Jews their religion and to Muslims their religion,' and he used to say to those who opposed him: 'To you your religion and to me my religion'(*lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn*)."[101] Similarly, in his exegesis of Q.4:139, Riḍā qualifies the unbelievers whom the believers are forbidden from taking as *awliyā’* with "*al-mu‘ādin lil-mu’minīn*" (those who are hostile to the believers).[102]

The hostility of the unbelievers is also emphasized by Abul Kalam Azad and Hamka. The former contends that "since the Jews and the Christians were hostile to the Prophet, it was desirable not to take friends from their ranks; and this particularly because at the time the

[100] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 279.
[101] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 426.
[102] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 463.

hypocrites among Muslims were going to their side."[103] Hamka gives possible reasons of why the Qur'ān explicitly refers to Jews and Christians rather than using the term "People of the Book" which, according to him, would be a honorific title. Due to their hostility to the truth brought by Muḥammad, he says, it would be unsuitable to refer to their scriptures that in their original form did not deviate from the divine truth.[104] Hamka, like other Muslim reformers, feels the need to explain why the Qur'ān considers "Jews and Christians are *awliyā'* to one another" (*ba'ḍuhum awliyā' ba'ḍ*), in spite of the fact they are at odd with each other. Among Muslim exegetes, two interpretations are offered. Firstly, the statement means that Jews are Jews' *awliyā'*, to the exclusion of all others, and the Christians likewise. This view is held by Riḍā.[105] The earlier exegete Ṭabarī supports this view, arguing that Jews and Christians are frequently in strife with each other.[106] Secondly, held by Ṭabaṭabā'ī, Jews and Christians are firmly united in their enmity against Islam. For the Iranian exegete, Jews and Christians love each other and they strive together to extinguish the light of God. "It is this factor that has made Jews and Christians – in spite of their mutual discord and enmity – a single society," says Ṭabaṭabā'ī.[107]

Hamka's explanation of the Qur'ānic phrase "*ba'ḍuhum awliyā' ba'ḍ*" seems to balance both aspects, namely, frequent discordance between Jews and Christians and their unity against Muslims. His take on the above phrase reflects that his interpretation of Q.5:51 is much influenced by the experience of colonialism and major events of his time. He acknowledges that "in terms of belief Jews and Christians are totally opposing to one another. The Jews accused Mary of being unfaithful. In the early period, the Jews have been the enemies of Christians, and

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[103] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān,* vol. 2, p. 302.
[104] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, p. 274.
[105] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 430.
[106] Ṭabarī, *Jama' al-bayan*, vol. 10, p. 399.
[107] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 373.

when the Christians were in a position of strength they took cruel revenge for this enmity."[108] However, he continues, they are not adverse to collaborating against Islam. During the convention of the Indonesian Constituent Assembly in Bandung, all representatives of Islamist parties wanted to include the clause that stipulated the application of *sharīʻa* to all Muslim subjects, but Catholics, Protestants, Nationalist, Socialist and Communist parties all were united in opposing the clause, although they had different ideologies and interests. He then draws his reader's attention to international events. In 1964, he says, Pope Paul VI suddenly declared an amnesty to Jews. For him, this was a political pact:

> Those wealthy Jews had to unite with Christians in facing the Islamic threat. Then, in 1967, the Arab countries were attacked by the Jews within four days, and Jerusalem (*Baitul Maqdis*) was seized from the Muslims' hands, who had held it for 14 centuries. And, suddenly, the Catholic Church came up with the idea of transferring the sovereignty of the Muslims over the Holy Land to an International body, that is, the United Nations, while those who had all the power within the United Nations are Christian countries. (Catholic France, Protestant America, Anglican Britain, and Communist Russia.)[109]

Like Hamka, the Lebanese exegete Mughniyya interprets the phrase "*baʻḍuhum awliyā' baʻḍ*" in light of his own concerns in his time. In his view, the early *mufassirūn* tended to agree on the discordance between Jews and Christians because they lived in time when there were no giant petroleum corporations and other monopolizing international institutions. "Today, after the establishment of these corporations, Christians saw in Jews the best connection (*khayr wasīla*) to rely on in their attempts to strengthen their monopoly."[110] For this very reason, he continues, they established the state of Israel in Palestine and made all efforts to protect it at the expense of Palestinian lives and dignities. Mughniyya is quick to note that "Our hatred (*karhūna*) of the Jews is only because they killed us in our own lands and expelled our women and children from

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[108] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 6, pp. 252-253.
[109] Ibid., p. 253.
[110] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kasif*, vol. 3, p. 73.

our houses. Likewise, the reason of our hatred and enmity for the United States, Britain and other colonial powers that support Israel is because these countries help Israel expel the people of Palestine from their bodes (*diyār*)."[111]

It is worth noting how Mughniyya, like Hamka, finds in the Qur'ānic phrase "*ba'ḍuhum awliyā' ba'ḍ*" a way to express his ideological and political concerns. Prior to this phrase, he interprets the Qur'ān prohibition "O, you who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as *awliyā'*" by delineating the general principle of equality and justice in Islam irrespective of different religion. "Every human being," Mughniyya says, "has the right to live with freedom and security, and no one has the authority to intervene as long as he does not violate the other's right."[112] He says that a Muslim must be punished and brought to justice if he violates and does mischief. At the same time, virtue (*birr*) and benevolence (*iḥsān*) should be extended to a Jew or a Christian who refrains from harming others, even though he rejects the prophethood of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān. In light of this principle, he interprets Q.5:51 as follows:

> "O, you who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* if they show enmity to you and are fighting you. But if they are peaceful you should deal with them in good manners so that all of you can live in peace and harmony. Moreover, you should treat them with kindness and justice, because God loves justice and benevolence for all of His creatures, either those who believe or do not believe, with only one condition, namely, that they should not cause harm to someone else. All human beings are God's family (*'iyāl allāh*), and the dearest to God are those who are most beneficial to His family.[113]

In his exegesis of Q.3:28, Mughniyya distinguishes between military affairs and social interactions among different religious communities. Concerning the former, he discusses two examples in which Muslims are not allowed to deal with non-Muslims, namely to become a spy (*jāsūs*) for the unbelievers against the Muslims and to love the unbelievers who are fighting

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., p. 72.
[113] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

against the Muslims. However, he argues that Muslims are allowed to make alliance and ask help from non-Muslims, both in their fight against the unbelievers as well as against the Muslim rebellions (*ahl al-baghy*), "because this fight falls within the category of establishing the truth, not of canceling it."[114] In the sphere of social interactions, Mughniyya seems to be more open to inter-religious friendship. He, for instance, writes, "If a Muslim befriends with a non-believer for ordinary reasons such as neighborhood, good manners, companionship in learning, cooperation in work or in trade, and all other things that are not related to religion, such a friendship is permissible."[115] This is so, according to Mughniyya, because a Muslim's friendship and affection with non-believers is forbidden only when it could lead to forbidden things. Otherwise, "such a friendship could bring benefit (*naf'*) and excellence (*khayr*) to people in such a way that God had commanded love, friendship and cooperation among all peoples irrespective of their religion."[116] He concludes his discussion of inter-religious engagement in Q.3:28 with the following observation:

> Undoubtedly, we recognize that among the unbelievers there are those who have better conduct (*aḥsan sīratan*) and nobler manner (*anbal khuluqan*) – in terms of honesty, faithfulness, and fulfillment – and much better than those who call themselves "Muslims." To make true friendship with them is better for humanity and general benefit than [making friendship with] treacherous officials (*al-'umalā' al-khawna*) who make a show of their religion and Islam.[117]

Like Mughniyya, the Syrian reformer Qāsimī holds that what makes inter-religious friendships and interactions forbidden is not their nature as inter-religious, but it is the end result that is forbidden. For him, therefore, inter-religious friendships and mutual helps can be forbidden (*ḥarām*) in certain cases, or permissible (*mubāḥ*) in other cases, or even obligatory

[114] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 2, p. 40.
[115] Ibid., p. 41.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

(*wājib*). For the first category (*ḥarām*), Qāsimī mentions a number of examples, such as friendship and alliance with non-Muslims because of their unbelief or that would harm the Muslims. However, friendship that would not necessitate unbelief or disobedience is permissible. As for the last category (*wājib*), Qāsimī simply refers to alliances for the benefits and interests of the Muslims.[118] One may get the impression from this classification that Qāsimī does not discriminate friendship and alliance based on difference in religion, because what accounts for the prohibition is not religion but forbidden consequences.

Qāsimī provides a detailed discussion of what kinds of interactions with the unbelievers are prohibited or otherwise allowed. He asserts that friendly interactions (*muwālā*) between Muslims and unbelievers are forbidden in specifically twofold: first, in matter of religion, and second, in other matters that glorify them. He makes this observation in response to a question put forth by his imagery interlocutor: Why does the Qur'ān prohibit friendship with unbelievers whereas marrying non-believing woman is allowed? In his exegesis of Q.3:28, Qāsimī refuses the idea that Muslims are not allowed to make alliance (*ḥilf*) or to ask help (*isti'āna*) from non-Muslims. If one argues that the occasion of revelation of the verse concerned with the prohibition of 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit from asking help from the Jews against the tribe of Quraysh, he asserts that Muḥammad himself did establish alliance with the Jews on a war against Quraysh, and "this is a clear proof for the permissibility of asking help from them.[119]

It seems clear that the Qur'ānic prohibition of taking the unbelievers, or the Jews and the Christians, as *awliyā'* does not provide proof of the intolerant nature of Islam. Some Muslim reformers find ways to synthesize it with the general principle of equality, justice and

[118] Ibid.
[119] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, vol. 4, p. 824.

benevolence outlined in the Qur'ān. Rashīd Riḍā strongly criticizes the earlier *mufassirūn* such as Zamakhsharī and Bayḍāwī for understanding the prohibition in terms of love and kind interaction (*ḥusn al-mu'āmala*) with the People of the Book.[120] The basis of their argument is twofold: First, the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) that says, "*lā tatarā'ā nārāhumā*" (You could not distinguish between their two fires).[121] This *ḥadīth* is generally understood to mean that the Muslim may not dwell in the country of the polytheists, and be with them so that each of them shall see the fire of other. The second argument is the order of 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb asking Abū Mūsā al-'Ash'arī to dismiss his Christian secretary.[122] As a response to the first argument, Riḍā writes, "Both (Zamakhsharī and Bayḍāwī) are wrong in presenting this tradition in this context. In fact, they have little knowledge about the science of prophetic tradition (*'ilm al-ḥadīth*)."[123] He then rejects the use of this *ḥadīth* for a number of reasons. First of all, in Riḍā's eyes, the *ḥadīth* is weak and it also relates to the obligation of migration (*hijra*) from the land of the polytheists to help the Prophet. The complete *ḥadīth* reads as follows:

> The Prophet sent a battalion to the tribe of Khath'am. Some of the members of the tribe sought salvation in performing prostration. However, the battalion hurriedly killed them. When the Prophet heard of this, he ordered them to their families to be paid half the amount of blood money and said: "I am free from every Muslim who lives amongst the polytheists." They asked: "Why is that, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "You could

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[120] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn al-ta'wīl wa wujūh al-ta'wīl* (Riyadh: Maktaba al-'abikan, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 249-250; Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2006), vol. 1, p. 270.

[121] E. W. Lane translates the phrase as "Their two fires shall not be within sight of each other." See Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), vol. 1, p. 1000.

[122] 'Umar is reported to have opposed Abū Mūsā al-'Ash'ari when the latter employed a Christian secretary. It is related that Umar sat in the mosque at Medina while Abū Mūsā was in front of him presenting the accounts of Isfahān – written in a fair hand and exactly reckoned, so that all who saw admired them. "Whose writing is this?" asked 'Umar. He said, "My secretary." When asked to bring his secretary, he replied: "He cannot come into the mosque." 'Umar said: "Is he unclean then?" He said: "No. He is a Christian." Then, 'Umar gave Abū Mūsā a slap on the thigh – so hard that he said he thought his thigh was broken – and said, "Have you not read the command of God: 'O, you who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as *awliyā'*, they are *awliyā'* to one another?' (Q.5:51)." Abū Mūsā then said: "This very hour I will dismiss him and give him leave to return to Iran." See Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, trans. Hubert Darke (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 164.

[123] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 428.

not distinguish between their two fires" (i.e. between those who were Muslims and who were polytheists).[124]

Riḍā argues that the use of this *ḥadīth* in interpreting Q.5:51 is incorrect, and he therefore infers that "the *ḥadīth* can not be used as a proof for the prohibition of mutual friendship and solidarity with the People of the Book."[125] He also notes that the *ḥadīth* concerns with the polytheists, not the People of Book, and the Qur'ān clearly distinguishes between the two communities. He says, "Don't you see that we are allowed to eat the food of the People of the Book and marry their women, to the exclusion of the polytheists."[126]

As for the second argument put forth by Zamakhsharī and Bayḍāwī, Riḍā simply refers to a story that took place during his visit to Dār al-Funūn in Istanbul in 1909. One of the teachers there taught the meaning of Q.5:51 by referring to Bayḍāwī, and a student stood up and asked: If that was the case as Bayḍāwī said, why does the state sometimes appoint Jews and Christians as ministers, senators, parliamentarians or civil servants? We are told that the teacher feared to death, because if he said something against the constitution he would be severely punished. In that situation, Riḍā asked the teacher if he could respond to the student. In Riḍā's own words, "I explained that *wilāya* in the verse is about the *wilāya* of helping (*wilāya al-naṣra*) and the verse does not prohibit the employment of non-Muslim *dhimmī*s. The student was satisfied with my explanation, so too other listeners. The teacher also looked happy."[127] Riḍā's point is that there is nothing wrong with non-Muslim appointment to public office, let alone mutual friendship and collaboration with them, as long as they are not fighting or conspiring against the Muslims.

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[124] This *ḥadīth* is related by Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī, and it is graded weak by Bukhārī, Nasā'ī, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Dāruqutnī.
[125] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 6, p. 429.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., p. 429.

Obstacles to Inter-Religious Relations

The opponents of peaceful inter-religious collaboration might argue that it is pointless to entrust Jews and Christians because they will never be content with the Muslims. Q.5:51 and similar verses have often been cited in support of the argument that the Qur'ān teaches Muslims to avoid Jews and Christians at all costs. As discussed above, this type of reading is problematic in light of reformist Muslim interpretations of the verses. In addition to Q.5:51, some scholars refer to Q.2:120 as a scriptural basis for rejecting inter-religious relations and collaborations. The verse reads as follows: "Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion (*milla*). Say, 'The guidance of God is the (only) guidance.' Were you to follow their desires after the knowledge that has reached you, then would you find neither *walī* (protector) nor *naṣīr* (helper) against God." While some Western polemists like Robert Spencer refer to the verse as a proof-text for the inherent intolerance of Islam,[128] some Muslims, as Muḥammad Shafiq puts it, "understand this verse as condemning any dialogue with Jews or Christians."[129]

Q.2:120 has often been cited when people want to justify mistrust toward Jews or Christians. It is not an exaggeration that Tariq Ramadan, a grandson of Ḥasan al-Bannā (the founder of the Muslim brothers in Egypt) who lives in Europe, asserts that "The verse is heard from mosque pulpits, in conferences, and at seminars, with the implication that it explains the attitude of Jews and Christians towards Muslims: their rejection of Islam, their double dealing,

[128] See Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muḥammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006), p. 178.

[129] Muḥammad Shafiq, "Teaching Interfaith Initiatives: Jews and Christians in Muslim Educational Institutions," in Moshe Maʻoz (ed.) *The Meeting of Civilizations: Muslim, Christian, and Jewish* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p. 133. See also Muḥammad Shafiq and Muhammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), p. 7.

not to say deceitfulness, and colonization, proselytism, wars, Bosnia, Palestine, and so on."[130] Ramadan offers a humanistic interpretation of the verse, saying that the phrase "Never will the Jews and the Christians be pleased with you" (*wa-lan tarḍā ʻanka al-yahūdu wa-lā an-naṣārā*) must be understood in terms of full and absolute satisfaction, expressed with the heart as well the mind. He asserts that, like Muslims, Jews and Christians convinced of the truth of their own message, complete satisfaction with the other is attained when the experience of faith and truth is shared. Ramadan then concludes: "It is within our communities of faith that we live most deeply the fullness of the meaning of *riḍā* [satisfaction] with the other who shares our truth, even if it is possible (though it is the exception rather than the rule) that we might experience a unique spiritual relationship with a woman or a man from another tradition."[131]

In Ramadan's view, the verse is speaking only of the intimate and very natural inclination of people of faith toward one another. This does not mean that in the absence of this full satisfaction one can not live in harmony and peaceful co-existence with people of other faiths. One can still feel and manifest deep and sincere respect toward a human being with whom one does not share this full spiritual communion. Ramadan reminds the reader that the ultimate purpose of Muslims is to please God, not other people. Thus, the full satisfaction shared with their coreligionists is only a stage along the way.[132] This is, certainly, a fresh interpretation of this difficult verse, but it lacks a critical engagement with textual and contextual analysis. Ramadan does not delve into various aspects in the text of this verse and see how its context of revelation tells us about its possible re-interpretation in the modern context. We shall now turn to

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[130] Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 207. See also Tariq Ramadan, "Interreligious Dialogue from an Islamic Perspective," in Christiane Timmerman and Barbara Segaert (eds.) *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue* (Brussels: Presses Interuniversitaires Europeennes, 2005), p. 93.

[131] Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, p. 207.

[132] Ibid.

reformist Muslim approaches to this verse by asking the following questions: What is this verse all about? How has it been interpreted by Muslim reformers?

A closer look at reformist *tafsīr*s reveals that the verse has been interpreted differently, although Muslim reformers pay less attention to its context of revelation. Among earlier *mufassirūn* we find Ṭabarī mentions a brief account of its context of revelation, namely, that Jews and Christians asked Muḥammad to follow their religions, claiming that true guidance was exclusively theirs. God revealed this verse to teach Muḥammad about how to respond to their claims.[133] Ibn al-Jawzī (d.597/1200) mentions another occasion of revelation, which relates to the change of *qibla* (prayer direction) from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba. Both the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Najrān, Ibn Jawzī says, expected Muḥammad to pray toward their *qibla*. So, when he changed to the Ka'ba, they were unhappy.[134] While the first report of *asbāb al-nuzūl* concerns with Jewish and Christian religious exclusivity, this report reveals their dissatisfaction because they wanted him to follow their teaching with respect to Jerusalem's centrality. From these two reports we can infer that the verse did not ask the Prophet to break his relation with the Jews and Christians, but only taught him that it was impossible to satisfy their desires.

Mughniyya mentions what seems to be another and different occasion of revelation from the two reports discussed above. Citing Ṭabarsi's *Majma' al-bayān,* he writes that Jews and Christians requested truce from Muḥammad and promised him, once they were given truce, to follow him and believe in him. But God made him despair of them. According to Mughniyya, it is not permissible to try to please them for a simple reason that they will only be pleased if someone becomes a Jew or a Christian. But, he notes further, this is not typical of the Jews or the

[133] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 562.
[134] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-islāmi li-ṭibā'a, 1964), vol. 1, p.137.

Christians alone, "most peoples of all religions would expect the same thing. Some peoples even go further to an extent that they will only be pleased with you if you become their slave."[135] From this verse we learn, Mughniyya continues, that the Qur'ān rejects such a tendency and calls for religious co-existence with all peoples of different religions (*al-ta'āyush al-dīnī ma'a jamī' ahl al-adyān*). The Qur'ān also "glorifies all Prophets and Messengers, mentions but good things about each of them, and commands [people] to follow them, recognize them and believe in them. This is one of the strongest encouragements for interreligious solidarity (*ta'ākhī*) and cooperation (*ta'āwun*) among the peoples of different religions."[136]

The emphasis on Jewish and Christian exclusivity is more evident in Abul Kalam Azad's interpretation of the verse. This Indian reformer paraphrases the first line of the verse as follows: "The fact is that however convincing the tokens of truth that you might offer, never will the Jews or the Christians be pleased with you. They will be pleased with you only when you follow their creed, since they think that nothing is religion except their own exclusive group identity."[137] According to Azad, the various groups into which human beings have resolved themselves, including Jews, Christians, and others, are all creations of human perversity. Group formation, he continues, engenders the spirit of exclusivism among its members and discourages love of truth and search for reality. It is by no means surprising that they pay most attention to one thing: the group to which a person belongs. When such is their disposition, no argument, however true, will be of any avail. Azad then concludes, "However good and sensible your beliefs and deeds, or

[135] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif*, vol. 1, p. 191.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 45.

however these are in conformity with their own approved teachings, the Jews and the Christians will not be pleased with you, unless you are a member of their fold."[138]

Azad understands the word *hudā* in the Qur'ānic phrase "*qul inna hudā allāh huwa al-hudā*" simply as "guidance." Other scholars like Ṭabaṭabā'ī interpret *hudā* as referring to the Qur'ān (*kināya 'an al-Qur'ān*). In Ṭabaṭabā'ī's reading, the phrase means that true guidance is the one that is brought by Muḥammad.[139] Mughniyya offers different possibilities of the meaning of *hudā,* including truth (*ḥaqq*), good deed (*'amal khayr*) and reward (*thawāb*).[140] Qāsimī mentions another possible intended meaning of God's guidance in the verse, namely, Islam.[141] Unlike other modern exegetes, Azad understands "guidance" in a general sense, and he notes further that "Divine guidance follows but one straight path. He who follows it will be the right-guided, whether or not he is a formal member of any of these groups."[142] It must be pointed out that this understanding is consistent with his idea of *waḥda-e-dīn* (unity of religion) discussed in Chapter 2 in such a way that all (organized) religions of all prophets teach a one single truth, that is, the straight path. It may be recalled that, for Azad, the difference among various religions is only in terms of law (*shir'a*) and way (*minhāj*), while the essence is same.

Hamka's take on the verse does not differ much from that of other Muslim reformers. He draws the reader's attention to the general background (*latar-belakang*) of the verse, although he does not allude to any specific occasion of revelation. Before Muḥammad was sent forth, Hamka begins his explication of the verse, the Arabs were illiterate and idol worshipers. Muḥammad then called them to stay away from idols and instead worship the one God and follow the

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[138] Ibid., pp. 44-45.
[139] Ṭabaṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* vol. 1, p. 265.
[140] Mughniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kāshif,* vol. 1, p. 191.
[141] Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl,* vol. 1, p. 241.
[142] Azad, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 44.

teaching of all Prophets from Moses to Jesus. This led some Jews and Christians to feel irritated (*jengkel*) because the Prophet did not propagated their religions, instead he criticized some aspects of their beliefs. For both Jews and Christians, Hamka continues, the only true guidance was theirs, thus Muḥammad was asked to be either a Jew or a Christian. This is the reason why Muḥammad was instructed to say, "Surely, God's guidance is the [only] guidance."[143]

However, it is generally accepted that Judaism, unlike Christianity and Islam, is not an active missionary religion. Thus, to say that the Jews are not pleased unless the Muslims follow their religion seems problematic. Hamka recognizes this problem and thus he changes the discourse from one of Judaization to one of influence. In other words, the Jewish dissatisfaction is understood not in terms of Judaizing the Muslims, but deepening of their influence in the Muslim lands. The verse under discussion, Hamka argues, "provides us with a clear message and guideline about how to compete in broadening influence and deepening religious authority." By shifting his discussion to the issue of the Jewish influence and affluence, Hamka falls into the conspiracy theory, claiming that Jews are so influential to the extent that the world economy today is in fact in their hands. The Jewish bankers are in control of giant financial corporations in the Wall Street, New York, and their economic system based on usury prevails all over the world, including in the Muslim world. Their affluence and influence eventually led to the establishment of the state of Israel with the support of the United States and Britain.[144] Here we can see that Hamka interprets the verse in a similar fashion of Q.5:51 discussed above. He then attempts to appeal to his Muslim readers to face this phenomenon not as a threat but as a challenge to strive together to launch an effective Islamic propagation. "If the Muslims hold

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[143] Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, p. 263.
[144] Ibid., p. 265.

firmly their religion and act accordingly, they would not be affected by the efforts of the adherents of the two religions."[145]

Riḍā's elucidation of the verse is slightly different from that of other reformers. In this verse, according to Riḍā, God entertains His Messenger (*sallā nabiyyahū*) after having failed to convince both Jews and Christians about the truth of his prophetic message. That is to say, in spite of the unity in the origin of their religion they fanatically followed their own religion and made it as an ethnic identity (*jinsiyya*) by rejecting the other. Riḍā comes to this conclusion not because he examines the context of revelation, but because he claims that is the nature of human being. In his words, "A human being would feel hurt severely when something unexpected happens. That is what happened with the Prophet when he fully expected the People of the Book hurriedly believe in him, but instead they vehement rejected and opposed him."[146] According to Riḍā, Muḥammad's expectation is based on his belief of the unity of the origin of their religion in the sense that the revelation which was coming to him was identical with that which had previously been given to Jews and Christians. It was natural for him to suppose that this would be as obvious to the Jews and the Christians as it was to him, and that they would accept him as a prophet. But their response to his call was wholly unsatisfactory. The great majority of them not merely did not accept Muḥammad, but became increasingly hostile. Therefore, according to Riḍā, the verse under discussion was intended to comfort him by explaining their habits of rejecting the other and of their hostility and adverse criticism of Muḥammad's claims to be a prophet until he followed them.

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[145] Ibid., p. 266.
[146] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 444.

However, to do justice to Riḍā, it should be mentioned here that he does not specify the application of the verse to Muḥammad's lifetime. Instead, like other Muslim reformers, he strongly argues that the verse is even more relevant to the modern context. Basing his view primarily on this mentor Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Riḍā contends that the main message of the verse is how to convey and propagate the truth without fear of bad consequences. "Whoever knows the truth and knows that God is his friend (*walī*) and helper (*naṣīr*)," Riḍā says, "he should not fear to firmly maintain it in spite of reproaches (*lawmata lā'im*)."[147] At any rate, it is safe to say that Q.2:120 does not envisage religious conversion. As understood by Muslim reformers, the verse does not mean that Jews and Christians will never be satisfied unless Muslims convert to their religions and, therefore, the use of the verse to support the idea that Islam restricts interreligious conversation and cooperation is not only baseless but also misleading. An interreligious engagement, it must be emphasized, is not about converting the "other," but rather it is about respecting the other's view and thereby paving the way for a peaceful co-existence.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed reformist Muslim interpretations of some of the most difficult passages in the Qur'ān that address the status of non-Muslims in a Muslim society or state. The question of religious rights and freedom of minority groups in Muslim majority countries has recently received a great deal of scholarly as well as popular attention. Various aspects of this question have been explored but we are still presented with conflicting views. While Muslim scholars tend to present such doctrines as *dhimma* and *jizya* as an example of Islam's tolerant treatment of non-Muslim subjects, some western scholars view such practices as discriminatory.

[147] Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār,* vol. 1, p. 446.

By treating non-Muslims living in the Muslim state as *dhimmī*s, one may conclude that the Muslims in fact regard the "others" as second class citizens. It should be pointed out, however, that there have been some endeavors by modern Muslim scholars to discard the concept of *dhimma* and *jizya* altogether in favor of equal citizenship.

From the above discussion we learn that Muslim reformers face some difficulties in contextualizing those polemical passages of Qur'ānic in light of religious diversity in the modern context. Nevertheless, they have attempted to offer a somewhat friendly picture of Islam by avoiding the characterization of Islam as inherently a violent religion. One should note that some of these passages have been employed by radical Muslims as an effective anti-Jewish and Christian polemical tool. Interestingly, the use and abuse of these passages have provoked a reaction from other Muslims who argue, as Mahmoud Ayoub notes, that passages in question "cannot be implemented in contemporary Muslim nation states, where citizenship rather than religious affiliation is supposed to determine the equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens."[148] However, responsible scholars should explore all possible interpretations of these difficult passages rather than simply discard them, because millions of the believers still look to the Qur'ān for guidance in their interactions with the others. I must admit that Muslim reformers might not have gone far enough in problematizing those passages in light of the modern notion of citizenship, but their different interpretations reveal that the Qur'ān, like other scriptures, is open to various perspectives and approaches. Like on other polemical issues discussed in the previous chapters, here on the Qur'ānic restrictions on inter-religious engagements and cooperations, some Muslim reformers developed generalizing and particularizing discourses in such a way that those restrictions should be applied to a specific condition, i.e., hostile

[148] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles," *The Muslim World* 94 (2004), p. 314.

environment. The general principle governing social relationships must be based on mutual respects, good manners and peaceful co-existence.

My own approach to reformist Muslim interpretations of these difficult passages is to assess these modern Qur'ān commentaries in light of more recent theories about the relation of a text to its reader. The exegesis is the product of its own time and place and I have shown above how modern Muslims struggle with the text revealed in seventh-century Arabia to make it relevant in the modern context. I would agree with Wilfred Cantwell Smith that there is no fixed meaning of the Qur'ān. Smith says "the real meaning of the Qur'ān is not any one meaning but is a dynamic process of meanings, in variegated and unending flow."[149] I also agree with Khaled Abu el Fadl that "Any text, including those that are Islamic, provides possibilities for meaning, not inevitabilities."[150] Certainly, the Qur'ānic pronouncement of *jizya*, its prohibition of taking the Jews and the Christians as *awliyā'* and its tendency to mistrust them must be re-evaluated and re-interpreted in light of interreligious relations and engagement. In the world where prejudices, hatred, violence, and distortion are so high, the need to overcome scriptural polemics is more obvious than ever. What we need now is to step forward with a new, fresh thinking to explore all possibilities that contribute to a genuine and peaceful co-existence. If modern Muslims are to build tolerant and pluralistic societies based on Qur'ānic teachings, they must be prepared to engage those difficult passages in a new exegetical course.

[149] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: an Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 11/4 (1980), p. 504.
[150] Khaled Abu el Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 22.

CONCLUSION

The complexity of answering the question of whether it is possible to interpret the polemical passages of the Qur'ān differently for non-polemical interactions in the modern world has been demonstrated in this dissertation. The basic contention of this study is that scriptural polemics are primarily intended as a means by which to establish and consolidate the identity of a religious community. What do these scriptural polemics mean in the modern world? Can they be interpreted differently? For this very reason, six modern *tafsīr*s written by Muslim reformers from different parts of the Muslim world are examined with the intention of demonstrating the extent to which their modern and local contexts have shaped, and been shaped by, their understanding of and approach to the Qur'ān. Since the Qur'ānic polemics involve many contentious issues of inter-religious engagements, this dissertation focuses on certain aspects that are central to the understanding of the polemical elements of the Qur'ān, including seemingly exclusivist views of other religions, charges of scriptural falsification, theological disputes over Jesus and the Trinity, and obstacles to inter-religious relations.

We first discussed the polemical context of the Qur'ān by looking closely at different phases of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. The argument put forth is that a Qur'ānic polemic, like other polemics, is developed in time and, therefore, it can be seen as a form of interplay: a situation gives rise to a certain polemic; the polemic reacts to this context and influences the situation. We have argued, for instance, that some of Medinan verses reflect a contentious relationship between Muḥammad and the Medinan Jews and/or Christians, and this uneasy relationship – and the political and social causes behind it – must be kept in mind when

considering what the Qur'ān has to say about the Jewish and Christian communities and their relations with the believers. Perhaps, because the Qur'ān responds to various situations there is a certain level of ambiguity in the Qur'ānic polemics against Jews and Christians. Even when the Qur'ān accuses Jews and Christians of corrupting their scriptures, the exact point of Qur'ānic criticisms is difficult to resolve. When discussing the question of supersession in the last section of Chapter One, we alluded to two contradicting groups of verses in the Qur'ān. On the one hand, there are Qur'ānic passages (i.e. Q.2:62; 5:48 and 5:69) that seem to extend salfivic promise to other religions and, on the other hand, other passages especially Q.3:19, 3:85 and 5:3 give the impression that Islam is the only true path to salvation.

While the last three passages have often been regarded as having superseded the more positive attitude, Muslim reformers do not solve the ambivalence through the notion of supersession or abrogation (*naskh*). Instead, they explicate the passages differently and understand "*al-islām*" in those passages in its generic meaning as an "obedience" and "submission" to God. One should note that the word "al-islām" in the Qur'ānic phrase "*inna al-dīna 'inda allāh al-islām*" (Q.3:19) is replaced in Ibn Mas'ūd's reading with "al-ḥanīfiyya",[1] the generic term for monotheism. For Muslim reformers, the Qur'ānic *islām* is the universal spirit of all religions brought by all Prophets. They differ, however, on whether the Qur'ānic *islām* can be understood at all in its reified form as the religion brought by Muḥammad. Rashīd Riḍā and Hamka seem to understand *al-islām* back and forth in its generic and reified meanings. Abul Kalam Azad, on the other hand, proposes the most inclusive approach to the Qur'ānic *islām* by coining what is known as *waḥdat-e-dīn* (the unity of religion). It is the idea of essentially one

[1] "Qara'a Abū 'Abdillāh: inna al-dīna 'inda allāhi al-ḥanīfiyya." See Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993), vol. 2, p. 426; see also Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), p. 32.

religion revealed to all mankind irrespective of their differences of race, culture, and creed. With this idea of *waḥdat-e-dīn*, Azad encourages a sympathetic attitude towards other religious traditions which, after all, in their original form were one and the same. It must be pointed out that the words "islām" and "muslim" are used in the Qur'ān not in reference to the institutionalized religion as we know today as Islam but as ways of designating the act of submission to God's will and those who practice it. Thus there is no reason why Q.3:19 and other similar passages (Q.3:85 and 5:3) should be understood as abrogating other passages that seem to open salvation to anyone who believes in God and the last day and does good deed. I would argue that the generic meaning of the Qur'ānic *islām*, rather than Islam, should be put at the center in order to create a more inclusive attitude toward those of other faiths and put all people who submit to God's will on equal footing, regardless of their religious affiliations.

Next, we discussed the serious charge leveled against the Jews in the Qur'ān, namely, *taḥrīf,* which is falsifying or tampering with the divine revelations they received. Some Muslims, including Riḍā, extend this accusation of falsification to the Christian scripture. In fact, perhaps because of his intense polemics with Christian missionaries, the Egyptian reformer directs the Qur'ānic charge of scriptural falsification more toward Christians than Jews. He utilizes several aspects of higher Biblical criticism to make the point that even some Western scholars have attested to the Biblical corruption. Other reformers such as Azad and Qāsimī take a different direction. The former does not question the reliability of the Biblical text, but rather relates the *taḥrīf* to the distortion of the correct interpretation of an authentic text. It is worth noting that Azad spends a great deal of time discussing Hindu scriptures like the Upanishads in positive terms. The Syrian scholar Qāsimī reinforces his generally positive assessment of the reliability and authenticity of the Bible and the Gospel by referring to a large number of earlier Muslim

authorities, from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr and Biqā'ī. He even finds the support from traditionalist Muslims such as Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī. As "the mouthpiece of the early Damascene Salafiyya" (to borrow Weismann's phrase), Qāsimī's positive attitude toward the Biblical text is hardly surprising. Ibn Taymiyya, a source of inspiration for Salafis and whose legacy Qāsimī attempted to revive, spoke of the Bible in positive terms. This positive attitude to the authenticity of the Biblical text is also expressed by later reformers from both Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions, including 'Abduh and Ṭabaṭabā'ī. It must be pointed out here that while Riḍā maintains that Jewish and Christian revelations had suffered from alteration (*tabdīl*) and neglect (*nisyān*), he insists that "the substance of their religion" (*jawhar dīnihim*) has remained recognizable, not distorted to the extent that guidance from its precepts is completely blocked."[2]

Theological aspects prove to be the most difficult issues facing Muslims in their explication of the Qur'ān's polemical texts. We focused our discussion on three contentious issues, namely, the questions of sonship, divine nature of Jesus and the Trinity. It seems that Muslim reformers face some difficulties in reconciling the strict monotheism of the Qur'ān with the Trinitarian monotheism of Christianity. However, their explanations and tones vary and some are more reconciliatory than others. Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, for instance, has his imaginary interlocutor asked whether the conception of God as one but has three *aqānīm* (persons, hypostases) can be categorized as *tawḥīd*. The answer to this question, according to Mughniyya, depends on what we mean by *aqānīm*: If understood in terms of attributes (*ṣifāt*), then that is *tawḥīd*. Certainly, some commentaries offered by these Muslim reformers might contribute to an ongoing discussion among contemporary scholars. On the Qur'ānic criticism of the Christian concept of God, Qāsimī offers an explanation that could contribute to an ongoing

[2] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Dār al-manār, 3rd edition, 1947), vol. 1, p. 337.

discussion among scholars. From the Qur'ān (especially Q.5:116), we learn that Christians were accused of believing in Mary as one of the three persons of the Trinity. The standard explanation offered by the British scholar Geoffrey Parrinder in 1965 and is followed by later scholars to date is that the Qur'ān addresses the early Cult of Mary, called Collyridians, which existed in Arabia in the first four centuries of the Christian era. Interestingly, Qāsimī offers the same explanation arguing that it is possible that the Qur'ān might in fact refer to the Collyridians or, sometimes he calls, *Maryāmiyyūn*. I would argue that Qāsimī's view is significant in the sense that he acknowledges that the Qur'ān does not criticize the belief of the mainstream Christians. One may ask, given that the Collyridians did not exist any longer, can the Qur'anic polemic transcend its context? Some Muslims try to find the relevance of the Qur'ānic criticism today, even though the actual opponent might have disappeared from the historical stage. Hamka and Ṭabaṭabā'ī, for instance, believe that the practice of venerating Mary does not disappear among certain Catholic churches.

Finally, we moved from theological issues to social aspects of inter-religious engagement. We discussed those passages of the Qur'ān that have often been regarded as obstacles to inter-religious relations, including the Qur'ānic injunctions on fighting non-Muslims until they pay *jizya* (Q.9:29), prohibiting Muslims to take the unbelievers as friends (5:51), and distrusting Jews and Christians (2:120). While explicating these passages, Muslim reformers seem to strongly repudiate an assertion that Islam is inherently an intolerant religion. In so doing, they interpret Q.9:29 and other sword verses in terms of self-defense. They also understand the concepts of *dhimmī* and *jizya* not as a form of discrimination against non-Muslims, but rather as a means by which they could participate equally in the Muslim society and/or state. There is a tendency among Muslim reformers to downplay the importance of *jizya*. Riḍā, for instance,

views the *jizya* as not originating from Islam. Mughniyya regards the lengthy discussion of *jizya* today as a kind of exaggeration. It seems clear that Muslim reformers attempt to understand *jizya* not as discriminatory policy against non-Muslims. In a similar vein, they attempt to limit the applicability of the prohibition of befriending and/or cooperating with non-Muslims within hostile circumstances. They differ on what the word *awliyā'* denotes, yet they agree that the prohibition verses refer to the hostility of the unbelievers, and not to their being unbelievers. Scholars like Qāsimī emphasize the fact that Muḥammad did establish alliance and cooperation with unbelievers, including Jews. Thus, human relations irrespective of religion, race, and ethnicity should be governed by the general principles of equality, justice and benevolence.

There are, at least, three issues that need a further elaboration. First, most modern Muslim reformers whose *tafsīr*s are examined in this dissertation seem to adhere to an inclusivist view on one issue and exclusivist on another. When dealing with the word "islām" in the Qur'ān, for instance, most Muslim reformers ascribe to an inclusive approach in the sense that the Qur'ānic *islām* transcends all the organized religions. In its broadest terms, *al-islām* has been understood to mean the personal relationship between human and God. A scholar like Abul Kalam Azad severely criticizes the tendency among Muslims to emphasize the objectified systematization of religious beliefs and practices, which scholars like Wilfred Cantwell Smith call "reification."[3] If *al-islām* in the Qur'ānic phrase "Verily the true religion with God is *islām*" (Q.3:19) is understood as the universal spirit of all religions, then the salvific promise in every religion must be recognized. Rashīd Riḍā even argues that belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad is not a *sine qua non* for salvation. Despite variability, both Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslim reformers do not

[3] Smith speaks of the process of reification as follows: "mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective systematic entity." See W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 47.

regard the Qur'ānic *islām* as a proof-text for the supremacy of the historical Islam over all other religions. This dissertation has explored the richness of reformist Muslim discussions of the term "*al-islām*" and analyzed the historical and sectarian situations out of which each author wrote his exegesis.

On the theological level, especially on such issues as the divine nature of Jesus and the Trinity, Muslim reformers maintain exclusivist views. On the question of the sonship of Jesus, for instance, they insist that the idea of divine sonship has no basis in either the Torah or the Gospel. They also criticize Christians for a physical understanding of the sonship of Jesus, a critique that has been rejected by Christians. Riḍā and Ṭabaṭabā'ī devote much space to bringing the Western sources into discussion. Both contend that ancient Christians used the word "ibn" (son) to denote one who is beloved or especially favored by God. They then cite several Western sources to show that the Christian belief in the Trinity was influenced by Indian belief concerning Trimurti and other such heathen ideas. Interestingly, however, Riḍā insists that there are many Christian thinkers who have rationally rejected the Trinity, and thus are true Unitarians. He may have heard of the Unitarians or perhaps other nineteenth-century Western critics of the Trinity. Hamka, who was also alluding to the Western sources, contrasted the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus with the strict monotheism that is advocated by the Qur'ān. Undoubtedly, theological issues are the most difficult subject of engagement between Muslims and Christians and have often been regarded as the barrier separating the two communities. However, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, such obstacles should not detain us from moving forward to a more ecumenical approach to religious plurality. We should find ways to turn these obstacles and barriers into opportunities for meaningful inter-religious conversations, one of which can be

done through an in-depth exploration of the diversity of Muslim views. As discussed above, even a single Muslim could be an exclusivist on one issue and inclusivist on another.

This leads us to the second issue to discuss, namely, that the diversity of Muslim views makes it difficult to simply label their approach to other religions as an inclusivist or exclusivist. Scholars often use such terms as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism to describe various attitudes to the truth of other religions.[4] This threefold typology was initially used in the Christian tradition, but it began to be applied to other religious traditions as well, including Islam. Exclusivism states that one's own religion is the only one and exclusive truth and all other religions are false. There is only one way to God and salvation. Those who accept exclusivism usually affirm that other religions possess some elements of wisdom, but these religions do not teach the truth of salvation and revelation. The Protestant theologian Karl Bath is often mentioned as an example of this paradigm,[5] although a more careful study seems to question the charge of his exclusivism.[6] Inclusivism affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive revelation of God. Karl Rahner is among Catholic theologians who advocate this inclusivist position towards other religions. In

[4] Alan Race is often said to have inaugurated this threefold typology, which delineates Christian attitudes to other religions. In his *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 7, he says: "In this study I adopt the headings Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism as a broad typological framework within which most of the current Christian theologies of religions can be placed."

[5] See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism,* p. 11. In his oft-quoted statement, Karl Barth takes up the idea of *solus Christus* and combines it with a sharp criticism of religion, saying "Religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man." See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), vol.1, p. 299. However, while assessing Barth's view of other religions, one should take into account that he was very much a man of his times, in which "his primary concern was not people of other religions but those who had engaged in the critical turn against religion." For a brief, yet good discussion on this, see Tom Greggs, "Bringing Barth's Critique of Religion to the Interfaith Table," *Journal of Religion* 88/1 (2008): pp. 75-94.

[6] In this regard, J.A. DiNoia, O.P. says, "On a careful reading of the relevant sections of the *Church Dogmatics*, as we shall see, the charge that Barth's position with regard to non-Christian religions falls simply at the exclusivist end of this spectrum cannot be sustained." See J.A. Di Noia, "Religion and the Religions," in John Webster (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 244. Gavin D'Costa briefly notes that Karl Barth "admittedly also overturns these categories by being an exclusivist, inclusivist, and universalist all at once." See D'Costa, "Theology of Religions," in David F. Ford (ed.) *The Modern Theologians* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 630.

one of his oft-quoted statements, Rahner says: "Christianity does not simply confront the members of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian."[7] Pluralism takes the opposite position of exclusivism, accepting that no one tradition can claim to possess the only truth. Prominent among Christian pluralists is the British philosopher of religion John Hick. In his *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Hick advocates what he calls a "Copernican revolution" in theology which replaces Christo-centrism with God-centered conception of religious truth. "It demands," he argues, "a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centred or Jesus-centred to a God-centred model of the universe of faiths. One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances."[8]

Recently a number of scholars problematize the above typology.[9] Even some of its proponents later on turn against it, such as Galvin D'Costa who in 1986 claims "that three dominant paradigms emerge from the recent history of theological reflection, usefully providing a conceptual matrix within which the theological issues are highlighted."[10] In a number of his more recent works, D'Costa rejects the whole typology as an "untenable" and "faulty typology."[11] He mentions two main reasons "for abandoning this threefold paradigm." First, this

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[7] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (London: Longman & Todd, 1969), vol.5, p. 131.
[8] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1973), p. 36.
[9] For example, see Ian Markham, "Creating Options: Shattering the Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist Paradigm," *New Blackfriars* 74/867 (1093): pp. 33-41; J.A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press,1992); Schubert Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dalas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992).
[10] Galvin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 6.
[11] Galvin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), p. 233. See also the more elaborate version of his critique in Galvin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.34-54.

typology fails to deliver on the question of the salvation of the unbeliever in a precise enough sense. Second, the terminology conceals the fact that all the different positions are exclusive in a very proper technical sense.[12] This last point means that there are not really three options but only one, that is, exclusivism because all theologians representing the threefold typology "are operating with an exclusivist singular particular notion of truth."[13] Other critics argue that there are more than three categories. Schubert Ogden basically accepts the typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, but he proposes a fourth category that holds "not that there *are* many true religions, but only that there *can be*."[14] Similarly, Paul J. Griffiths proposes fourth and fifth categories, which he calls "restrictivism" (not all will be saved) and "universalism" (all will be saved).[15]

The findings of this dissertation also call into question the adequacy of the threefold typology, though from a different perspective. A careful examination of the views of Muslim reformers on a variety of issues reveals that the application of these categories to them may fall well short of their divergent views on different issues. Thus, it is no longer possible to label a certain individual thinker as an exclusivist on all accounts. For instance, Qāsimī seems to be an exclusivist in his understanding of the Qur'ānic *islām,* since he considers the Qur'ān as referring to the religion brought by Muḥammad. However, his interpretation of the *taḥrīf*-verses and other verses dealing with inter-religious interactions is in line with an inclusivist paradigm. The Syrian reformer never questions the reliability and authenticity of the Biblical texts, and therefore the *taḥrīf*-verses must be understood as referring to the occurrence of misinterpretations. He also

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[12] Galvin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions,* pp. 34-35.
[13] Ibid., p. 35.
[14] Schubert Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, p. 83.
[15] Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 161-169.

endeavors to offer an inclusivistic interpretation of the sword verses and other verses that have often been regarded as obstacles to inter-religious relations. He struggles not only with the texts of the Qur'ān but also with the views of the Salafi forefathers such as Ibn Qayyim. Unlike other scholars, Qāsimī reads the latter's view as less discriminatory to other religious communities than is sometimes supposed. In a similar vein, Azad might have been the most pluralist of all Muslim reformers examined in this study, but he is still reluctant to accept the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity as a different expression of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). To summarize, given the complexity of reformers' views, the labeling must be based on a case-by-case study. Certainly, the threefold typology is still useful in classifying and profiling the patterns of religious attitude toward others, but it needs a refinement by considering what they said (views), and not merely they who said (persons). Because any attempt to judge persons, rather than their views, as exclusivists or inclusivists or even pluralists inevitably falls victim of an unjustified generalization.

Finally, another form of generalization that this dissertation attempts to challenge is the tendency among scholars to situate modern *tafsīr*s within the tradition of the classical ones as if modern exegetes offer nothing new in their exegetical enterprise. As discussed in the Introduction, it is common to view the classical *tafsīr*s as having determined modern interpretation. This view assumes that the Qur'ān commentaries of different periods and of diverse sectarian backgrounds are a unified tradition in such a way that both "classical and modern *tafsīr* represents, to a large extent, a coherent and internally consistent body of literature."[16] This dissertation questions the assumption that modern Qur'ān commentaries do not

[16] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 28.

depart significantly from the patterns and approaches of the classical *tafsīr*s. While some elements of continuity are not denied, it has been argued in this study that Muslim reformers' insightful comments are also shaped by their own concerns within their local and global contexts. This dissertation has shown how Muslim reformers critically referred to classical *tafsīr*s, but also picked and chose among other authoritative sources while at the same time they were very much engaged with the challenges of their times.

It is worthwhile that most modern Muslim reformers do not rely heavily on earlier *tafsīr*s alone. Their sources include non-*tafsīr* works such as the biography of the Prophet, theology, jurisprudence, and modern writings by both Muslim and non-Muslim authors. In his exegesis of Q.5:3, especially on the question of the perfection of religion (*kamāl al-dīn*), Rashīd Riḍā refers extensively to Shāṭibī's *Muwāfaqāt,* a famous Mālikī text in the philosophy of Islamic law. He also makes a significant use of Western sources that seem to support his contention. Perhaps, Qāsimī is the most extensive in his use of the early sources, yet he not only refers to the works of exegetes such as Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī, Rāzī, Bayḍāwī and Abū al-Su'ūd but also cites scholars from a wide variety of fields from theologians to jurists and from medieval to modern periods, including Ash'arī, Bāqillānī, Shāṭibī, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim, Shah Waliullah and 'Abduh. The Indonesian scholar Hamka is distinguished for his deep engagement with the local contexts. In most cases, he attempts to "indigenize" the meaning of the Qur'ān to fit the Indonesian experience. With that in mind, it surprised no one that, as discussed in the Introduction, some of these modern Muslims demonstrated a critical assessment of the earlier *mufassirūn*. Even when they cited the early *tafsīr*s, these Muslim reformers added their own explanations to those sources in order to make them relevant in different times and places. It is true that in constructing their arguments they were sometimes attempting to make persuasive arguments for the present

by referring to a past and to an authoritative corpus, but this does not mean that the *tafsīr* tradition is static and unchanging discourse. Throughout our discussion we have seen how complex and diverse Muslim reformers' interpretations of the polemical elements of the Qur'ān.

It is, therefore, important to look at reformist Muslim approaches to the polemics of the Qur'ān as evolving discourses in such a way that would allow us to evaluate them in terms of the manner they engage with various sets of arguments that are still relevant in the modern contexts. These Muslim reformers have attempted to reactualize the hermeneutical task, i.e., a reinterpretation of the Qur'ān that is deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition, which conceptualizes human history as a continuum of renewal, revival and reform (*tajdīd*, *iḥyā'*, *iṣlāḥ*). In our discussion of each chapter we have also shown the limits and sometimes contradictions in their arguments, which may reflect the ambivalence and ambiguity of the Qur'ān itself. However, in spite of such limits, Muslim reformers have offered a kind of ecumenical approach to the polemical aspects of the Qur'ān. For those who are interested in inter-religious relations, what we need is to develop the kind of exegesis or hermeneutics that can contribute to better understanding of each other's scriptures as well as to eliminate common misunderstandings in inter-religious conversations and engagements.

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Appendix

Verses Cited in Each Chapter

Bellow are the Qur'ānic verses that I mention in the chapters of this dissertation. Some of these verses are cited completely and others are either cited partially or only referred to in the order that they are in the Qur'ān. The translation is by Arthur Jeffery with some modification.

Chapter One

Q.2:62: Truly those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness, shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve.

Q.2:75: Are you then so eager that they should believe you, seeing there is a group of them that hear God's word, and then knowingly distort it after they have understood it?

Q.2:79: Woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.

Q.2:101: When there has come to them a messenger from God confirming what was with them [i.e. their scripture], a group of them that were given the book throw the book of God behind their backs, as if they did not know.

Q.2:113: The Jews say, "The Christians have no ground to stand upon"; and the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground to stand upon," while they recite the same book.

Q.2:135: They say, "Become a Jew or Christian if you would be guided."

Q.2:111-112: And they say, "None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or Christian." Those are their desires. Say, "Produce your proof if you are truthful." Nay, whoever submits his face to God and does good deeds, he will get his reward with his Lord, there shall be no fear, no shall they grieve.

Q.3:65-67: O People of the Book! Why do you argue about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Have you no sense? Do you not argue about things of which you have knowledge? Why, then, argue about things of which you have no knowledge! God knows, but you know not! Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but was a *ḥanīf muslim.*

Q.3:68: Surely, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are those who follow him, and this Prophet and those who believe [in him]; and God is the guardian of all believers.

Q.4:156-158: And for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny; and for their saying, "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God" -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him,

except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed; God raised him up to him; God is all-mighty, all-wise.

Q.4:171: The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and his word that he committed to Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in God and his Messengers, and do not say, "Three." Refrain: better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to him -- That he should have a son!

Q.5:73: They do blaspheme who say: God is the Third of Three. No god is there but one God. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement.

Q.5:116: And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God'?" He said, "Glory to you! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, you know it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within your soul; You know the things unseen."

Q.6:144: Those to whom we have given the book know very well that it (the Qur'ān) has been sent down from your Lord in truth.

Q.9:30: The Jews say, "Uzayr is the son of God"; the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of God." That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!

Q.9:34: Many of the rabbis (*al-aḥbār*) and monks (*al-ruhbān*) eat up the wealth of the people by false means and prevent (them from the way of Allah. As for those who accumulate gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God, give them the good news of a painful punishment.

Q.11:110: We certainly gave the book to Moses, but differences arose therein: had it not been that a word had gone forth before from their Lord, the matter would have been decided between them, but they are in suspicious doubt concerning it.

Q.16:64: We have sent down the book to you, only because you may explain to them what they differed about, and so that it may be guidance and mercy for those who believe.

Q.22:30-31: So turn aside from the filth of idols and turn aside from lying speech, turning to God [alone], not ascribing partners to Him; for whoever ascribes partners to God, it is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had seized him or the wind had blown him to a distant place.

Q.38:4-7: So they were surprised that a warner has come to them from their midst. Those unbelievers say, "This is a lying conjuror! Has he made the deities into one God? This is indeed a strange thing!" The chiefs among them go around saying, "Go, and remain faithful to your gods. This is certainly something concocted. We have not heard such thing among people recently. It is only a fabrication."

Q.28:52-53: Those to whom we have given the Book before it believe in it. And when it is recited to them they say, "We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord, we have been *muslim*s."

Q.38:4-7: So they were surprised that a warner has come to them from their midst. Those unbelievers say, "This is a lying conjuror! Has he made the deities into one God? This is indeed a strange thing!" The chiefs among them go around saying, "Go, and remain faithful to your

gods. This is certainly something concocted. We have not heard such thing among people recently. It is only a fabrication.

Q.41:13: But if they [the unbelievers] turn away, then say, "I warn you of a thunderbolt like to the thunderbolt of 'Ād and Thamūd."

Q.73:15-16: Surely we have sent unto you [people of Mecca] a messenger as a witness over you, even as we sent to Pharaoh a messenger, but Pharaoh rebelled against the messenger, so we seized him remorselessly.

Q.87:18-19: This is in the ancient books, the books of Abraham and Moses.

Q.89:6-14: Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with 'Ād, Iram of the pillars, the like of which was never created in the land, and Thamūd who hollowed the rocks in the valley, and Pharoah, he of the tent-pegs, who all were insolent in the land and worked much corruption therein? Your Lord unloosed on them a scourge of punishment; surely your Lord is ever on the watch.

Q.2:42: And do not confound the truth with vanity, and do not conceal the truth wittingly.

Q. 2:62: Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabeans, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness – their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow.

Q.2:79: So woe to those who write the Book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.

Q.2:80: And they say, "The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days." Say: "Have you taken with God a covenant? God will not fail in His covenant; or say you things against God of which you know nothing?"

Q.2:81: Not so; whoso earns evil, and is encompassed by his transgression – those are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever.

Q.2:101: When there has come to them a Messenger from God confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the Book reject the Book of God behind their backs, as though they knew not.

Q.2:111-112: And they say, "None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their desires. Say, "Produce your proof if you are truthful." Nay, whoever submits his face to God and does good deeds, he will get his reward with his Lord, there shall be no fear, no shall they grieve.

Q.2:113: The Jews say, "The Christians have no ground to stand upon"; and the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground to stand upon," while they recite the same book.

Q.2:124: And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them. He said, "Behold, I make you a leader for the people." He said: "And of my seed?" He said "My covenant shall not reach the evildoers."

Q.2:135: They say, "Become a Jew or Christian if you would be guided."

Q.2:140 Or do you say, "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes -- they were Jews, or they were Christians?" Say: "Have you then greater knowledge, or God? And who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from God? And God is not heedless of the things you do."

Q.2:146: Whom We have given the Book, and they recognize as they recognize their sons, even though there is a party of them conceal the truth and that wittingly.

Q.2:159: Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after We have shown them clearly in the Book -- they shall be cursed by God and the cursers.

Q.2:174: Those who conceal what of the Book God has sent down on them, and sell it for a little price - they shall eat naught but the Fire in their bellies; God shall not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection neither purify them; there awaits them a painful chastisement.

Q.2:207: But other men there are that sell themselves desiring God's good pleasure; and God is gentle with His servants.

Q.3:19: The true religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another. And whoso disbelieves in God's signs. God is swift at the reckoning.

Q.3:21: Those who disbelieve in the signs of God and slay the Prophets without right, and slay such men as bid to justice -- do thou give them the good tidings of a painful chastisement.

Q.3:24: That, because they said, "The Fire shall not touch us, except for a number of days"; and the lies they forged has deluded them in their religion.

Q.3:50: Likewise confirming the truth of the Torah that is before me, and to make lawful to you certain things that before were forbidden unto you. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; so fear you God, and obey you me.

Q.3:65-67: O People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, but after him. What, have you no reason? Ha, you are the ones who dispute on what you know; why then dispute you touching a matter of which you know not anything? God knows, and you know not. No; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a Muslim and one pure of faith; certainly he was never of the idolaters.

Q.3:68: Surely the people standing closest to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the Protector of the believers.

Q.3:71: O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal the truth and that wittingly?

Q.3:85: Whoever desires another religion than *al-islām*, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.

Q.3:110: You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honor, and forbidding dishonor, and believing in God. Had the People of the Book believed, it were better for them; some of them are believers, but the most of them are ungodly.

Q.3:112: Abasement shall be pitched on them, wherever they are come upon, except they be in a bond of God, and a bond of the people; they will be laden with the burden of God's anger, and

poverty shall be pitched on them; that, because they disbelieved in God's signs, and slew the Prophets without right; that, for that they acted rebelliously and were transgressors.

Q.4:171: Joyful in blessing and bounty from God, and that God leaves not to waste the wage of the believers.

Q.3:181: God has heard the saying of those who said, "Surely God is poor, and we are rich." We shall write down what they have said, and their slaying the Prophets without right, and we shall say, "Taste the chastisement of the burning."

Q.3:183: Those same men said, "God has made covenant with us, that we believe not any Messenger until he brings to us a sacrifice devoured by fire." Say: "Messengers have come to you before me bearing clear signs, and that you spoke of; why therefore did you slay them, if you are truthful?"

Q.3:187: And when God took compact with those who had been given the Book: "You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal it." But they rejected it behind their backs and sold it for a small price -- how evil was that their selling!

Q.4:54-55: Or are they jealous of the people for the bounty that God has given them? Yet We gave the people of Abraham the Book and the Wisdom, and We gave them a mighty kingdom. And some of them there are that believe, and some of them that bar from it; Gehenna suffices for a Blaze!

Q.4:156-158: and for their unbelief, and their uttering against Mary a mighty calumny, and for their saying, "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God" -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed; God raised him up to him; God is all-mighty, all-wise.

Q.4:161: And for their taking usury, that they were prohibited, and consuming the wealth of the people in vanity; and we have prepared for the unbelievers among them a painful chastisement.

Q.5:12-14: God took compact with the Children of Israel; and we raised up from among them twelve chieftains. And God said, "I am with you. Surely, if you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and believe in my Messengers and succor them, and lend to God a good loan, I will acquit you of your evil deeds, and I will admit you to gardens underneath which rivers flow. So whosoever of you thereafter disbelieves, surely he has gone astray from the right way. So for their breaking their compact we cursed them and made their hearts hard, they perverting words from their meanings; and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of; and you will never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them. Yet pardon them, and forgive; surely God loves the good-doers. And with those who say "We are Christians" We took compact; and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of. So we have stirred up among them enmity and hatred, till the Day of Resurrection; and God will assuredly tell them of the things they wrought.

Q.5:15: O People of the Book! There has come to you Our Messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the Book, and effacing many things. There has come to you from God a light, and a Book Manifest.

Q.5:18: Say the Jews and Christians, “We are the sons of God, and his beloved ones.” Say: “Why then does he chastise you for your sins? No; you are mortals, of his creating; He forgives whom he will, and he chastises whom he will.” For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them; to him is the homecoming.

Q.5:41: O Messenger, let them not grieve you, who race each other in unbelief, such men as say with their mouths “We believe” but their hearts believe not; and the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to you, perverting words from their meanings, saying, “If you are given this, then take it; if you are not given it, beware!” Whomsoever God desires to try, you can not avail him anything with God. Those are they whose hearts God desired not to purify; for them is degradation in this world; and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement.

Q.5:46: And we sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him and we gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing.

Q.5:48: And we have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it. So judge between them according to what God has sent down, and do not follow their caprices, to forsake the truth that has come to you. To every one of you we have appointed a right way and an open road. If God had willed, he would have made you one nation; but that he may try you in what has come to you. So be you forward in good works; unto God shall you return, all together; and he will tell you of that whereon you were at variance.

Q.5:69: Surely those who believe, the Jews, the Sabeans, and the Christians, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.

Q.5:73: They are unbelievers who say, “God is the third of three.” No god is there but one God. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement.

Q.5:116: And when God said, “O Jesus son of Mary, did you say unto men, ‘Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God’?” He said, “Glory to you! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, you know it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within your soul; You know the things unseen.”

Q.6:20: Those to whom we have given the Book recognize it as they recognize their sons. Those who have lost their own souls, they do not believe.

Q.6:91: They measured not God with His true measure when they said, “God has not sent down aught on any mortal.” Say: “Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers.” Say: “God.” Then leave them alone, playing their game of plunging.

Q.6:144: Of camels two, of oxen two. Say: “Is it the two males he has forbidden or the two females? Or what the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you witnesses when God charged you with this? Then who does greater evil than he who forges against God a lie, in order that he may lead mankind astray without any knowledge? Surely God guides not the people of the evildoers.”

Q.9:30: The Jews say, “Ezra is the Son of God”; the Christians say, “The Messiah is the Son of God.” That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!

Q.9:34: O believers, many of the rabbis and monks indeed consume the goods of the people in vanity and bar from God’s way. Those who treasure up gold and silver, and do not expend them in the way of God – give them the good tidings of a painful chastisement.

Q.10:94: So, if you are in doubt regarding what we have sent down to you, ask those who recite the Book before you. The truth has come to you from your Lord; so be not of the doubters.

Q.11:110: And we gave Moses the Book; and there was difference regarding it, and but for a word that preceded from thy Lord, it had been decided between them; and they are in doubt of it disquieting.

Q.12:38: And I have followed the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Not ours is it to associate aught with God. That is of God’s bounty to us, and to men; but most men are not thankful.

Q.13:36: And those to whom we have given the Book rejoice in what is sent down unto you; and of the parties some reject some of it. Say: “I have only been commanded to serve God, and not to associate aught with him. To him I call, and to him I turn.”

Q.16:43: We sent not any before you, except men to whom we revealed: “Question the people of the remembrance, if it should be that you do not know.”

Q.16:53: Whatsoever blessing you have, it comes from God; then when affliction visits you it is unto him that you groan.

Q.16:64: And we have not sent down upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that whereon they were at variance, and as a guidance and as a mercy to a people who believe.

Q.20:133: They say, “Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?” Has there not come to them the clear sign of what is in the former scrolls?

Q.21:7: And We sent none before you, but men to whom we made revelation – question the People of the Remembrance, if you do not know.

Q.28:52-53: Those to whom we gave the Book before this believe in it. And when it is recited to them, they say, “We believe in it; surely it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, even before’ it we had surrendered.”

Q.53:36-7: Or has he not been told of what is in the scrolls of Moses, and Abraham, he who paid his debt in full?

Q.61:6: And when Jesus son of Mary said, “Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.” Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, “This is a manifest sorcery.”

Q.62:6: Say: “O Jews! If you assert that you are the friends of God, apart from other men, then do you long for death, if you are truthful.”

Chapter Two

Q.2:62: Truly those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness, shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve.

Q.2:111-112: And they say: "None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their (vain) desires. Say: "Produce your proof if you are truthful." Nay, whoever submits his whole self to God and does a good deed, he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Q.3:19: The true religion with God is *al-islām*. Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another. And whoever disbelieves in God's signs, God is swift at the reckoning.

Q.3:85: Whoever desires another religion than *al-islām*, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.

Q.5:3: This day I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my favor unto you, and I have approved *al-islām* for your religion.

Q.5:48: For each one of you we have appointed a law (*shir'a*) and a way (*minhāj*).

Q.6:159: Surely, those who have made divisions in their *din* and turned into factions, you have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with God alone; then he will tell them what they have been doing.

Q.2:62: Surely those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow.

Q.2:213: The people were one nation; then God sent forth the Prophets, good tidings to bear and warning, and he sent down with them the Book with the truth, that he might decide between the people touching their differences; and only those who had been given it were at variance upon it, after the clear signs had come to them, being insolent one to another; then God guided those who believed to the truth, touching which they were at variance, by His leave; and God guides whomsoever he will to a straight path.

Q.3:176-178: Let them not grieve you that vie with one another in unbelief; they will nothing hurt God; God desires not to appoint for them a portion in the world to come, and there awaits them a mighty chastisement. Those who buy unbelief at the price of faith, they will nothing hurt God; and there awaits them a painful chastisement. And let not the unbelievers suppose that the indulgence we grant them is better for them; We grant them indulgence only that they may increase in sin; and there awaits them a humbling chastisement.

Q.4:125: And who is there that has a fairer religion than he who submits his will to God being a good-doer, and who follows the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith? And God took Abraham for a friend.

Q.5:48: And we have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it. So judge between them according to what God has sent down, and do not follow their caprices, to forsake the truth that has come to you. To every one of you we have

appointed a right way and an open road. If God had willed, he would have made you one nation; but that he may try you in what has come to you. So be you forward in good works; unto God shall you return, all together; and he will tell you of that whereon you were at variance.

Q.6:159: Those who have made divisions in their religion and become sects, you are not of them in anything; their affair is unto God, then he will tell them what they have been doing.

Q.9:29: Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and his Messenger have forbidden -- such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book -- until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.

Q.10:19: Mankind were only one nation, then they fell into variance. But for a word that preceded from thy Lord, it had been decided between them already touching their differences.

Q.23:23: And We sent Noah to his people; and he, said, "O my people, serve God! You have no god other than he. Will you not be godfearing?"

Q.23:32: And we sent amongst them a Messenger of themselves, saying, "Serve God! You have no god other than he. Will you not be godfearing?"

Q.23:45: Then we sent Moses and his brother Aaron with Our signs and a manifest authority.

Q.23:50-53: And we made Mary's son, and his mother, to be a sign, and gave them refuge upon a height, where was a hollow and a spring: "O Messengers, eat of the good things and do righteousness; surely I know the things you do. Surely this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord; so fear me." But they split in their affair between them into sects, each party rejoicing in what is with them.

Q.60:7-9: It may be God will yet establish between you and those of them with whom you are at enmity love. God is all-powerful; God is all-forgiving, all-compassionate. God forbids you not, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause, nor expelled you from your habitations, that you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them; surely God loves the just. God only forbids you as to those who have fought you in religion's cause, and expelled you from your habitations, and have supported in your expulsion, that you should take them for friends. And whosoever takes them for friends, those -- they are the evildoers.

Chapter Three

Q.2:42: And do not confound the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) with vanity, and do not conceal the truth wittingly.

Q.2:58: And when we said, "Enter this township, and eat easefully of it wherever you will, and enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say, unburdening; we will forgive you your transgressions, and increase the good-doers."

Q.2:59: Then the evildoers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon the evildoers wrath out of heaven for their ungodliness.

Q.2:71: He said, "He says she shall be a cow not broken to plough the earth or to water the tillage, one kept secure, with no blemish on her." They said, "Now she has brought the truth"; and therefore they sacrificed her, a thing they had scarcely done.

Q.2:75: Are you then so eager that they should believe you, seeing there is a group of them that heard God's word, and then distorted it, and that after they had comprehended it, wittingly?

Q.2:79: So woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, "This is from God," that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.

Q.2:104: O you who believe, do not say, "*rā'inā*," but say, "*unẓurnā*" (regard us) and hear, as there is a grievous punishment for the unbelievers.

Q.2:129: And our Lord, do yhou send among them a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them; You are the all-mighty, the all-wise.

Q.2:140: Or do you say, "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes -- they were Jews, or they were Christians?" Say: "Have you then greater knowledge, or God? And who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from God? And God is not heedless of the things you do."

Q.2:146: Those to whom we have given the book recognize him (it) as they recognize their sons, even though there is a group of them that conceal the truth wittingly.

Q.2:148: Every man has his direction to which he turns; so be you forward in good works. Wherever you may be, God will bring you all together; surely God is powerful over everything.

Q.2:159: Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that we have sent down, after we have shown them clearly in the Book -- they shall be cursed by God and the cursers.

Q.2:174: O believers, eat of the good things wherewith we have provided you, and give thanks to God, if it be him that you serve.

Q.3:71: People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal the truth and that wittingly?

Q.3:78: And there is a group of them twist their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, "It is from God," yet it is not from God, and they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly.

Q.3:93: Say: "Bring the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful."

Q.3:187: And when God took compact with those who had been given the Book: "You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal it." But they rejected it behind their backs and sold it for a small price -- how evil was that their selling!

Q.4:37: Such as are niggardly, and bid other men to be niggardly, and themselves conceal the bounty that God has given them. We have prepared for the unbelievers a humbling chastisement.

Q.4:46: Of those who are Jews there are those who distort the word from its places and say, "We have heard and we disobey" and "hear, and may you not hear" and "Observe us," twisting with their tongues and traducing religion. If they had said, "We have heard and obey" and "hear and regard us," it would have been better for them, and more upright; but God has cursed them for their unbelief so they believe not except a few.

Q.5:13: So for their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard, they distort the word from its places and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of; and you will never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them. Yet pardon them, and forgive; surely God loves the good-doers.

Q.5:15: O People of the Book! There has come to you our Messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the Book, and effacing many things.

Q.5:41: O Messenger, let those who vie with one another in unbelief not grieve you, such men as say with their mouths "we believe" but their hearts believe not; and the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to you, distorting the word from its places saying, "If you are given this, then take it; if you are not given it, beware!" Whomsoever God desires to try, they can not avail him anything with God.

Q.5:43: Yet how will they make you their judge seeing they have the Torah, wherein is God's judgment, then thereafter turn their backs? They are not believers.

Q.6:91: They measured not God with His true measure when they said, "God has not sent down aught on any mortal." Say: "Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers." Say: "God." Then leave them alone, playing their game of plunging.

Q.7:157: Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet of the common folk, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel, bidding them to honor, and forbidding them dishonor, making lawful for them the good things and making unlawful for them the corrupt things, and relieving them of their loads, and the fetters that were upon them. Those who believe in him and succor him and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him -- they are the prosperers.

Q.7:162: Then the evildoers of them substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon them wrath out of heaven for their evildoing.

Q.61:6: And when Jesus son of Mary said, "O Children of Israel! I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, "This is a manifest sorcery."

Chapter Four

Q.2: 111: And they say, "None shall enter Paradise except that they be Jews or Christians." Such are their fancies. Say: "Produce your proof, if you speak truly."

Q.2:143: Thus we appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people, and that the Messenger might be a witness to you; and we did not appoint the direction you were facing, except that We might know who followed the Messenger from him who turned on his heels -- though it were a grave thing save for those whom God has guided; but God would never leave your faith to waste - truly, God is all-gentle with the people, all-compassionate.

Q.2:253: And those Messengers, some we have preferred above others; some there are to whom God spoke, and some he raised in rank. And we gave Jesus son of Mary the clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit. And had God willed, those who came after him would not have fought one against the other after the clear signs had come to them; but they fell into variance, and some of them believed, and some disbelieved; and had God willed they would not have fought one against the other; but God does whatsoever he desires.

Q.3:42: And when the angels said, “Mary, God has chosen you, and purified you; He has chosen you above all women.”

Q.3:52: And when Jesus perceived their unbelief, he said, “Who will be my helpers unto God?” The Apostles said, “We will be helpers of God; we believe in God; And do bear witness that we are muslims.”

Q.3:79: It belongs not to any mortal that God should give him the Book, the Judgment, the prophethood, then he should say to men, “Be you servants to me apart from God.” Rather, “Be you masters in that you know the Book, and in that you study.”

Q.3:110: You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honor, and forbidding dishonor, and believing in God. Had the People of the Book believed, it were better for them; some of them are believers, but the most of them are ungodly.

Q.4:80: Whosoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys God; and whosoever turns his back - We have not sent you to be a watcher over them.

Q.4:116: God forgives not that aught should be with Him associated; less than that He forgives to whomsoever He will. Whoever associates with God anything, has gone astray into far error.

Q.4:171: People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His word that he committed to Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in God and his Messengers, and say not, “Three.” Refrain; better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to him -- That he should have a son! To him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God suffices for a guardian.

Q.5:17: They are unbelievers who say, “God is the Messiah, Mary’s son.” Say: “Who then shall overrule God in any way if he desires to destroy the Messiah, Mary’s son, and his mother, and all those who are on earth?” For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them, creating what he will. God is powerful over everything.

Q.5:18: Say the Jews and Christians, “We are the sons of God, and his beloved ones.” Say: “Why then does he chastise you for your sins? No; you are mortals, of his creating; He forgives whom he will, and he chastises whom he will.” For to God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth, and all that is between them; to him is the homecoming.

Q.5:66: Had they performed the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten both what was above them, and what was beneath their feet. Some of them are a just nation; but many of them -- evil are the things they do.

Q.5:72: They are unbelievers who say, “God is the Messiah, Mary’s son.” For the Messiah said, “Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Verily whoso associates with God

anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers.”

Q.5:73: They are unbelievers who say, “God is the Third of Three.” No god is there but One God. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement.

Q.5:75: The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger; Messengers before him passed away; his mother was a just woman; they both ate food. Behold, how we make clear the signs to them; then behold, how they perverted are!

Q.5:111: And when I inspired the Apostles: “Believe in Me and My Messenger”; they said, “We believe; And bear witness that we are muslims.”

Q.5:116: And when God said, “O Jesus son of Mary, did you say unto men, “Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God’?” He said, “Glory to you! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, you know it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within your soul; You know the things unseen.”

Q.9:30: The Jews say, “Ezra is the Son of God”; the Christians say, “The Messiah is the Son of God.” That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!

Q.19:36: Surely God is my Lord and your Lord; So serve you Him. This is a straight path.

Q.43:86: Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly.

Q.45:12: God is he who has subjected to you the sea that the ships may run on it at His commandment, and that you may seek His bounty; haply so you will be thankful.

Q.112:3: Who has not begotten, and has not been begotten.

Chapter Five

Q.2:120: Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion. Say: “God’s guidance is the true guidance.” If you follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find neither nor helper against God.

Q.2:256: No compulsion is there in religion. Rectitude has become clear from error. So whosoever disbelieves in idols and believes in God, has laid hold of the most firm handle, unbreaking; God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

Q.2:257: God is the Protector of the believers; He brings them forth from the shadows into the light. And the unbelievers -- their protectors are idols that bring them forth from the light into the shadows; those are the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.

Q.3:28: Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends, rather than the believers -- for whoso does that belongs not to God in anything -- unless you have a fear of them. God warns you that you beware of Him, and unto God is the homecoming.

Q.4:139: Those who take unbelievers for their friends instead of believers -- do they seek glory in them? But glory altogether belongs to God.

Q.4:144: O believers, do not take the unbelievers as friends instead of the believers; or do you desire to give God over you a clear authority?

Q.5:51: O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers.

Q.5:57: O believers, do not take as your friends those of them, who were given the Book before you, and the unbelievers, who take your religion in mockery and as a sport -- and fear God, if you are believers.

Q.6:1: Praise belongs to God who created the heavens and the earth and appointed the shadows and light; then the unbelievers ascribe equals to their Lord.

Q.9:29: Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden -- such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book -- until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.

Q.9:73: O Prophet, struggle with the unbelievers and hypocrites, and be firm against them; their refuge is Hell -- an evil refuge indeed.

Q.60:7-8: It may be God will yet establish between you and those of them with whom you are at enmity love. God is All-powerful; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate. God forbids you not, as regards those who have not fought you in religion’s cause, nor expelled you from your habitations, that you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them; surely God loves the just.

Conclusion

Q.2:62: Surely those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow.

Q.2:120: Never will the Jews be satisfied with you, neither the Christians, not till you followest their religion. Say: ’God’s guidance is the true guidance.’ If you follow their desires, after the knowledge that has come to you, you shall have against God neither protector nor helper.

Q.3:19: The true religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another. And whoso disbelieves in God’s signs. God is swift at the reckoning.

Q.3:85: Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.

Q.5:3: Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, what has been hallowed to other than God, the beast strangled; the beast beaten down, the beast fallen to death, the beast gored, and that devoured by beasts of prey - excepting that you have sacrificed duly -- as also things sacrificed to idols, and partition by the divining arrows; that is ungodliness. Today the unbelievers have despaired of your religion; therefore fear them not, but fear you me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion. But whosoever is constrained in emptiness and not inclining purposely to sin -- God is all-forgiving, all-compassionate.

Q.5:48: And we have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it. So judge between them according to what God has sent down, and do not follow their caprices, to forsake the truth that has come to you. To every one of you we have appointed a right way and an open road. If God had willed, He would have made you one nation; but that He may try you in what has come to you. So be you forward in good works; unto God shall you return, all together; and He will tell you of that whereon you were at variance.

Q.5:51: O believers, do not take Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoever of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers.

Q.5:69: Surely those who believe, the Jews, and the Sabaeans, and the Christians, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.

Q.5:116: And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary, did you say unto men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God'?" He said, "Glory to you! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, you know it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within your soul; You know the things unseen"

Q.9:29: Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden -- such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book -- until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.